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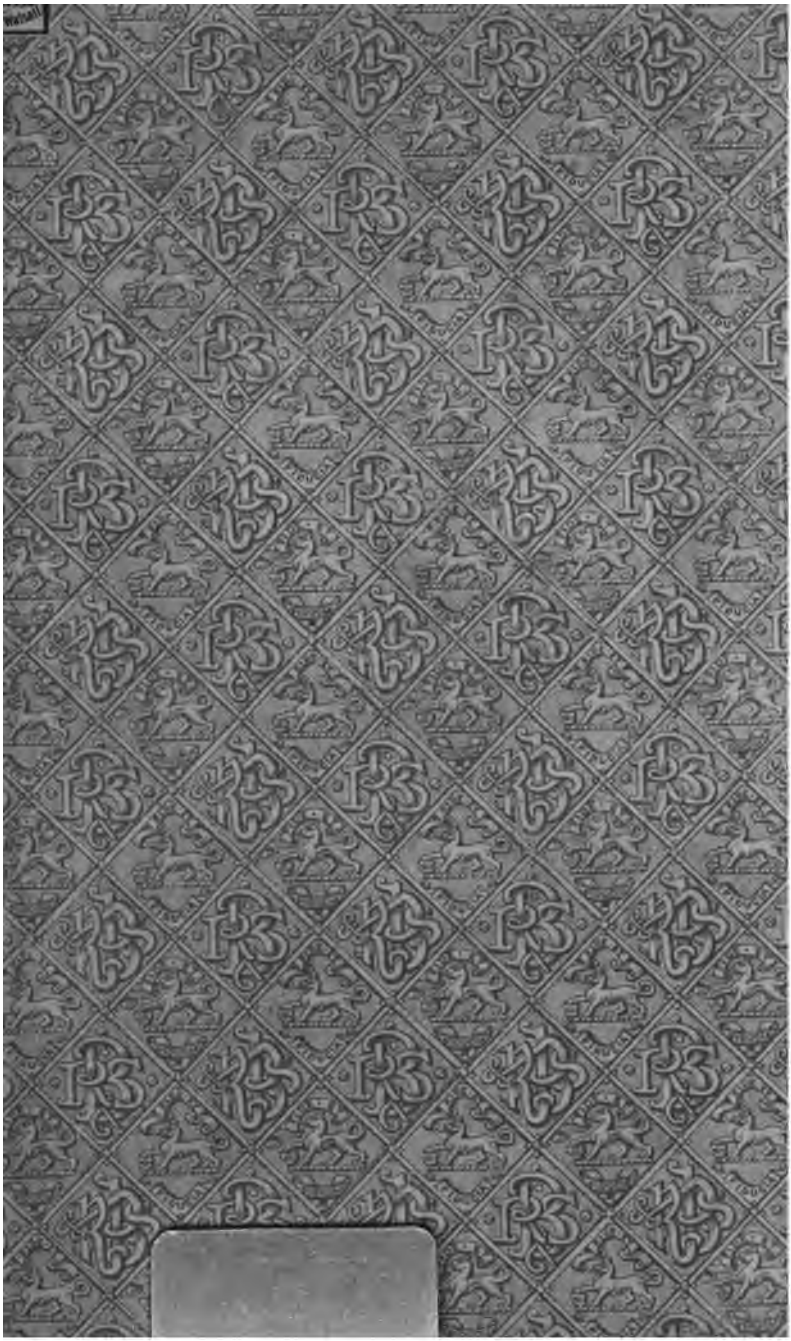
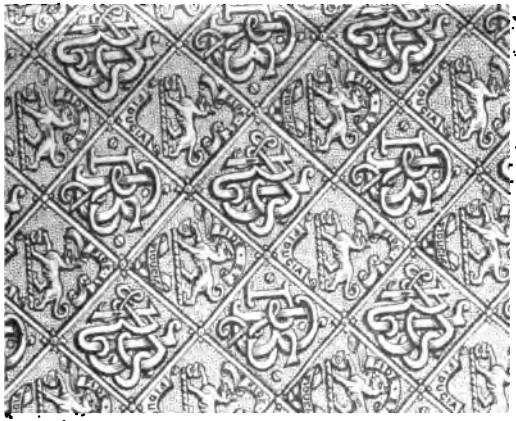
MRS. HENRY WOOD

A MEMOIR





MEMORIALS

OF

MRS. HENRY WOOD

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PRINTED IN FRANCE

Very sincerely yours
Ellen Wood.

From a miniature by Easton

London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1894

MEMORIALS

MRS. HENRY WOOD

MEMORIALS

OF

MRS. HENRY WOOD

BY HER SON

CHARLES W. WOOD

AUTHOR OF 'UNDER NORTHERN SKIES,' 'LETTERS FROM MAJORCA,' ETC. ETC.

LONDON

RICHARD BENTLEY & SON, NEW BURLINGTON STREET

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1894

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DEDICATION

More than twenty years ago we published, anonymously, a work with the following Dedication:

'To my Mother;

'*FOR WHOSE SAKE I WILL HOLD THE WORLD GOOD.*'

To-day we would repeat this Dedication with greater knowledge and experience; but it can only now be inscribed:

To Her Memory.

" Dear friend, far off, my lost desire,
So far, so near in woe and weal;
O loved the most, when most I feel
There is a lower and a higher;

" Known and unknown; human, divine;
Sweet human hand and lips and eye;
Dear heavenly friend that canst not die,
Mine, mine, for ever, ever mine;

" Dear friend, past, present, and to be;
Loved deeplier, darklier understood;
Behold, I dream a dream of good,
And mingle all the world with thee."

" IN MEMORIAM."

PREFACE

THE following Memoirs of Mrs. Henry Wood have been compiled from notes, from fragments of diaries, from memory. They are the result of many a conversation, many a story, many a reminiscence, never to be forgotten whilst life remains. Above all, they are the fruit of a life-long companionship; a similarity of tastes, a closeness and unity of occupation; an intimacy between mother and son perhaps never exceeded.

This companionship was constant; until, when childhood and youth passed into manhood, it was only broken by the occasional absences which belong to the changes and chances of life. Sweet was the converse, charmed the hours, perfect the union, where all thoughts were outspoken, and no shadow came between: a delight and an influence nothing else has approached. Through those long years she loved to dwell upon her earlier life. Hours of conversation, oft repeated, made that past, in which the writer had no part or lot, familiar

as though he had been ever present, and all had been a personal experience.

A lengthier record might have been given of the deeds and words of a strangely beautiful life; but length would avail nothing. The records in their brevity are but a faint reflection of Mrs. Henry Wood; multiplied, the reflection would still be faint.

In one respect some of the finest traits of her character are revealed in the very absence of such materials as the biographer finds most available and most effective. It never struck her to accumulate records, deeming that some day the world would wish to hear about her life. She did not with this view systematically keep journals, nor did she preserve the letters of others or retain copies of her own letters. So far as such elements are concerned, these Memorials may be found wanting: but the writer has named his work Memorials rather than a Life or a Biography; and he has aimed rather at giving some suggestion of the spirit in which she lived and worked than at presenting a formal and detailed memoir.

If he has failed, despite the disadvantages he has had to contend against, the blame must lie with him and not with the subject; for it is certain that few have equalled her in high ideals and fulfilled endeavours, as few have approached her in the unobtrusiveness of her ways. The narrative is a simple

statement of the quiet annals of many years, neither humorous nor pathetic, and without exciting elements. Eminently wise and great as she was, equally did she excel in directness of motive, in modesty and humility; so that only those who knew her best were aware how closely she was allied to all things lovely and of good report; how almost flawless was the jewel that threw on all around its rays of sympathy and compassion; thus unconsciously leading many to those Paths of Peace she knew so well, and in which she was ever found.

Something of this is recorded in the following pages; but the result is as imperfect as the description of a brilliant sunset falls short of the beauties of light and colouring actually seen. Yet it is a memorial wreath—a last offering—humbly and reverently placed upon the tomb of one who was, for the writer, ever without peer and without parallel, *sans peur et sans reproche*, from the first remembered impression until the moment when

> "Her life, a white perfumed blossom,
> Sprang to Heaven."

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PART I

CHAPTER I

" I sometimes hold it half a sin
To put in words the grief I feel ;
For words, like Nature, half reveal
And half conceal the Soul within."

CLOISTERS, WORCESTER CATHEDRAL.

ELLEN PRICE—afterwards Mrs. Henry Wood—was born in the city of Worcester when the century was still young. It was the year memorable for the great frost, when the Thames was frozen over and bullocks were roasted whole upon the ice-bound surface. Just before this severe cold set in, when many of the poor were frozen to death as they trudged along the country roads, and people began to wonder

whether the ice age were returning, the child was ushered into the world whose name some fifty years later was to be enrolled amongst those who have earned fame and fought a good fight. She was born on the 17th January 1814; therefore at the time of her death—10th February 1887—was seventy-three years of age.

Yet no one thought or spoke of her as being old. Time seemed to have passed her by in his flight. She had the rare gift of perpetual youth, and was young in mind, manner and appearance to the end; her intellect as sparkling and her heart as green as they had been half a century earlier. For her the day never came when, as Wordsworth says,

> ". . . Nothing can bring back the hour
> Of splendour in the grass, or glory in the flower."

She delighted in everything that was pure and lovely, all her keen and vivid impressions, all her interest in life and humanity, all her sympathy with joy and sorrow, remained undiminished to the end.

She was christened Ellen, without any second name, and was the daughter of Mr. Thomas Price, one of the largest glove manufacturers in the city of Worcester, as his father had been before him.

An only child, Mr. Thomas Price had inherited a large property from his father, who died when he was only a little turned fifty. His son had received what would have been a liberal education in these days and was a very exceptional one in those. Originally destined for the Church, when the time came for final decision he chose

to follow in his father's footsteps and became a simple manufacturer.

With all his mental gifts, there was in him a want of ambition, an indifference to the world's honours, which kept him from all aspirations. "He cared for none of these things." From a worldly point of view perhaps he chose wisely, but his talents ought to have been exercised in a different field. Remarkable for intellect and refinement, a gentleman and a scholar, his attributes could find little scope in the counting-house of a manufactory. True, he spent much time in his study, leaving to managers the work of directing; but this, after all, was only a compromise with what should have been. In classics he was so good an authority that some of the Church dignitaries would consult him upon abstruse or doubtful points, implicitly accepting his opinion—a great condescension in those days, when the austere Canons would hardly have claimed acquaintance with the heir to a throne if he had turned glove manufacturer—so much has the world changed since the century was young. The bent of his genius was classical rather than mathematical. Intimate with some of the Prebendaries, who condescended to make a solitary exception in his favour, he was more fitted for a cathedral stall than the calling he had adopted. He was a special favourite of Bishop Carr—of George IV. renown: who had none of the episcopal pride and unapproachableness that so often accompany the wearing of the apron; who was the first bishop to appear in Worcester Cathedral without his wig, to the horror and scandal of those who loved pomp and ceremony and the observance of ancient customs. On his deathbed the

Bishop lamented that Mr. Price had not a son in the Church, whose interests he might have advanced, even at the eleventh hour.

Thomas Price was accomplished as well as learned; skilful in music, an art of which he was passionately fond; whilst his sketches in water-colour were far above the average of amateur productions. Landscapes, interiors, the human figure—he did all equally well; but in drawing animals, if we may compare small things with great, he was as unsuccessful as Turner was with his men and women. He delighted in works of the imagination, and was a great reader of novels, Scott being his favourite author, whom he read and re-read all the days of his life; but those were days when the choice of novelists was limited. He was also a great chess-player, moved rapidly, and seldom lost a game. Everything he undertook he did to the utmost of his powers, and those powers were of a very high order.

The writer saw him once, and once only, when as a young child he had been brought over to England on a short visit. He was then a venerable-looking gentleman, with calm and dignified manners and subdued tones; an abundance of white hair, and a face beautiful in age. Punctilious in dress, as in all matters of courtesy and everyday life, he still wore large frills to his shirt-front, though they had gone out of fashion excepting with gentlemen of the old school. Large white cuffs set off his white and delicate hands, and he leaned much, in talking, on a massive silver-headed stick. Altogether he was exactly the picture of age and dignity to strike with awe an impressionable child. On that occasion he had come up

to London to visit his daughter, Mrs. Henry Wood, who was unable to go down into Worcestershire.

Up to the age of seven Ellen Price was brought up in the house of her grandmother, a lady who adorned her home, but took no part in its management. Member of a county family, in marrying the glove manufacturer—handsome, a gentleman, and wealthy though he might be—she was considered to have married beneath her. These distinctions, we repeat, have very much passed away, and will do so still more; but a century ago the old order had not changed. In *Mildred Arkell* we remember how Lucy Cheveley was supposed to have lost caste in marrying Peter Arkell.

In her own early home Mrs. Price, the grandmother, had never been initiated into the mysteries of housekeeping. Surrounded by luxury, this branch of a girl's education was considered unnecessary for one who was probably destined to a distinguished marriage, but who, as we have seen, sacrificed ambition to love. She was never able to master the intricacies of domestic details, and in her new home these had to be confided to a housekeeper: a middle-aged upper servant, who had lived in the father's house from the time of the daughter's birth. She now had charge of everything, and the women servants were under her control. Her name was Tipton; she was a very original character, and never appeared in anything but a prim silk gown. No doubt she was the foundation of the type of old and faithful servant Mrs. Henry Wood has described in some of her novels.

The young child Ellen was Mrs. Tipton's especial charge

and favourite, though she had also her own personal attendant and separate rooms; for in spite of being the sunshine of her grandmother's existence, she was only allowed to be with her at stated times, according to the stricter fashion of those days. The housekeeper generally accompanied the child in her morning walks, and in the afternoons, whenever she went out in the carriage with her grandmother, was always in charge. In all matters needing personal activity and command Mrs. Price was singularly useless, even in controlling children. The child's place in the carriage was seldom allowed to be otherwise occupied, until the rule almost amounted to a superstition. If no friend were present, Tipton had to be at her post, no matter how great the inconvenience.

In their drives they often passed over the old bridge spanning the Severn, and the charming view so delighted the child that more often than not the carriage was stopped for a few moments' enjoyment. It was a scene Mrs. Henry Wood frequently alludes to in her novels. Here the mischievous College boys flung old Ketch's keys into the water; here poor Charley Channing disappeared in his terror. Below flowed the calm, lovely river. Upon its banks rose the grave and dignified Cathedral, surrounded by its ancient Prebendal houses, by trees that waved and rustled and whispered in the wind; whilst round the venerable tower the rooks, looking almost as old and dignified, cawed and flew and wheeled with all their solemn air and sound. Not far off, the famous spire of St. Andrew's, rising in singular beauty towards the heavens, was clearly outlined: a contrast to the dignified square Cathedral tower. The

placid water flowing to the sea reflected a thousand objects on which the child ever longed and lingered to gaze. Trees and sky and Cathedral outlines all found their duplicate in the famous stream, and to the imaginative young girl it was ever a dream of Fairyland that in after years rose up at Memory's call. Longer drives were frequently taken to the surrounding villages, to more distant parts of the county, until the wholé neighbourhood far and near became familiar and beloved; indelibly stamped upon the child's brain. It is all this neighbourhood—the villages, lanes and ancient houses of Worcestershire—that in after years she so vividly reproduced in *Johnny Ludlow;* so that places and scenes not visited for half a century are as accurately described as though sketched on the spot.

Few counties possess more picturesque villages than Worcestershire, especially the neighbourhood of the Faithful City, which abounded in those days in the old timber houses —the "Worcestershire houses," as they have been called — which add so much to the beauty of its landscape. The modern element, now only too visible, was still non-existent; whilst all the traces of a bygone period of romance, so great a charm and feature of Worcester itself, had not begun to suffer from the inevitable effects of time and decay. All this portion of England is a sylvan dream that has occupied many an artist's pencil and many a poet's pen. In the accompanying illustrations we have endeavoured to reproduce some of the rural and antiquarian charm of these villages, and some of the antiquarian and historical interest of Worcester itself. The illustrations both of English and foreign scenes

are all places consecrated to Mrs. Henry Wood's earlier life; scenes amidst which she dwelt, and day by day and year by year grew familiar with and deeply loved, both at home and abroad; and in placing them in her Memoir, we enable the reader to realise more vividly the impressions that so greatly influenced her mind, and insensibly gave their colouring to her work.

Mr. Price lived in a large house, under the very shadow of the Cathedral, where they always attended service. Thus the child's earliest impressions were tinged with the ecclesiastical element to which she grew devoted, and which is so frequently introduced into her novels. Doubtless, even before she could speak, her large wondering eyes would trace with earnest gravity the solemn Cathedral outlines. From this she would turn to the College boys tearing through the gateway of Edgar Tower; would listen to their footsteps clattering through the cloisters as they rushed to and from school; and thus even in infancy she began to study unconsciously the character of that complex creature, the schoolboy, to be reproduced in later years with so much truth and fidelity.

It was in one of their morning walks that the housekeeper, whilst probably she saved the life of her charge, also possibly laid the foundation for future lifelong delicacy.

She had been warned against a certain field, in which a bull was wont occasionally to pass his days. This bull had been known to show signs of viciousness, and was to be avoided. Unfortunately Mrs. Tipton, like many other excellent people, had a will of her own — a far stronger will, indeed, than her gentle mistress. She was accustomed

WORCESTER.

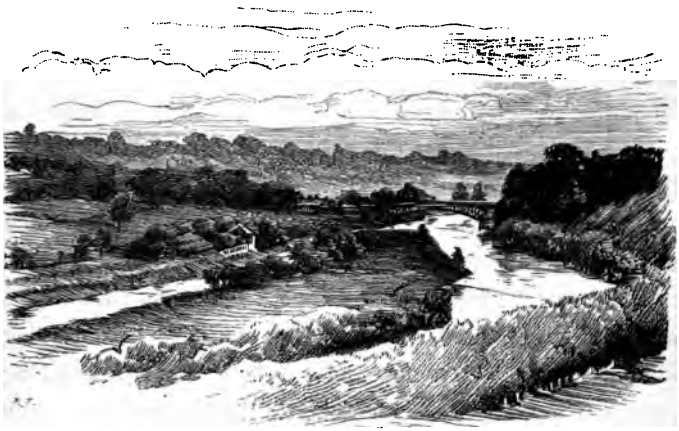
to command, and to think for herself. The field was a favourite field with her, and a pathway running diagonally through it led to her favourite walk.

On this particular morning the bull was certainly there, but at the far end, quietly grazing, and looking as if he and mischief had parted company for ever. The pathway was at this end of the field, the bull at that end; it was ridiculous to talk of danger, argued Mrs. Tipton: and they passed over the stile. The child was wearing a red silk hood trimmed with fur, and when they were half-way across the path the mild-looking animal caught sight of the hood—and was mild no longer. With one furious bound he charged down upon them. Tipton, repenting too late, paralysed with fear, took the child in her arms, and rushed onwards for dear safety: it was, indeed, a race for life. She gained the farther hedge, but not the stile. The bull was almost upon them. Scarcely knowing what she did, wild with terror, she threw the child over the hedge into the adjoining field.

How she escaped herself she never knew: whether she reached the stile in time, or broke through the hedge, she could never tell; but she did escape. Expecting to find the child seriously injured, she was surprised to see her standing unharmed, but pale, quiet, and startled. Perhaps the long grass had saved her. Perhaps her fall had been broken by one of those guardian spirits in whom all her life she firmly believed, and to whose care she ever seemed providentially consigned. The escape was certainly little less than a miracle.

Tipton never again had the opportunity of transgressing,

even if she had the wish, for the bull was seen no more. He had forfeited the right to his ambrosial fields, and spent the remainder of his life in a humble shed. And Mrs. Tipton herself was never quite the same afterwards. The shock had been great, and she possibly felt that having received mercy she must show mercy in return. Henceforth she ruled with less severity in her little kingdom; the sceptre was more visible than the sword; until, in a very few years, she and many of her beloved surroundings passed into the unknown, and their places knew them no more.



THE SEVERN FROM HOLT FLEET.

CHAPTER II

"The seasons bring the flower again,
And bring the firstling to the flock;
And in the dusk of thee, the clock
Beats out the little lives of men."

WORCESTER CATHEDRAL AND CLOISTERS.

THE childhood of genius is said to be either very awakened or very backward. In the case of Ellen Price it was the former. At seven years old she had gone through the studies of girls twice her age. She could repeat whole poems, such as Gray's *Elegy* and the *Deserted Village;* and before she was thirteen knew by heart a great deal of Shakespeare. Her memory was remarkable. In later days, when asked to

do so by her children, she would sometimes recite in the twilight, by the hour together, poem after poem: her sweet and gentle tones so quiet and impressive that—to give a solitary example—at

> "The cricket chirrups on the hearth,
> The crackling faggot flies,"

one almost heard the one and saw the other. Time after time her intonation and emphasis seemed to bring out new charms and meanings, betraying singular depths of quiet feeling and sympathy with the poet. The year before she died, one of her children having asked a question with regard to Sterne's *Maria*, she immediately repeated two whole pages bearing upon the subject. Yet she had never opened the book since she was thirteen—an interval of sixty years. As a child, after reading her daily tasks once through, she could always say them fluently. History was her favourite study, and to the end of life there were few historical facts and persons that she could not recall at will.

In her early home she had all things very much her own way; all her wishes were regarded. Her grandmother supplied her liberally with pocket-money; but where in most cases it would have been spent in toys and bon-bons, in this instance it went in books: in stories and fairy tales, in poetry and history; books of which she soon possessed a great store, looked upon as her chief treasure and resource. With these, even as a young child, she would take refuge from the world around her, and become lost and absorbed in an ideal existence of her own.

We have heard her say that even in those early days this was her great happiness—to be amongst her books. Already her mind was busy weaving simple plots and small romances, and she would endow living people with strange histories and create fictitious characters to suit her childish imaginings. The quiet cloisters she crowded with dream people, and at night as she watched the outlines of the Cathedral steeped in moonlight, she would fancy the dark and solemn aisles peopled with all the ghosts of those who reposed there and belonged to the historic past. When only three years old her grandmother would teach her poems which she easily learned by heart, and when friends were present she would be brought into the drawing-room to recite verse after verse. She was looked upon as a small wonder, and it was well that she did not develop into that most unfortunate of all fates, an infant prodigy. But her mind, happily, was never introspective, dwelling upon self, a mental condition that always leads to suffering, and too often to failure. She was ever occupied with outward things, taking the keenest interest in all her surroundings. Nevertheless, the indulged life at her grandmother's could not be without a certain danger, and perhaps it was well that it was soon to be interrupted.

When she was seven years old, Mr. Price, the grandfather, died, after a few months' mysterious illness which baffled all physicians. He suffered no pain, but gradually grew weaker, faded, and passed away. After death, when lying in his coffin, it was proposed to take in his little grand-daughter—of whom during life he had been so fond, and who had returned all his affection—for one look before the last sad office was performed,

and the face for ever closed to mortal eyes. The act, kindly prompted, was a mistake. Peculiarly sensitive and impressionable, a nature probably no one quite understood or realised, the child was so terrified by the sight that she fell into strong hysterics, and for many hours they almost feared for the result. In time she calmed down and recovered; but the impression remained, and was never forgotten.

After the death of her grandfather changes were made in the household, and it was decided that the little girl should return to her own home.

For her this meant the commencement of a new life. At her grandmother's she had reigned alone, the light and charm of the household; a child with capacities beyond her years; her every desire gratified. In the new home she became the companion of her father, whose cultivated mind guided her from that hour, and no doubt had considerable influence in directing her intellect. Over and above her governess, he superintended her reading; and she ever looked up to him with the utmost reverence and affection. Mr. Thomas Price was a very good man, without being what is called deeply religious. At any rate he made no parade of his religion. Goodness was innate with him, and he inherited from his mother that calmness of spirit which caused him to take the affairs of life only too quietly. He was eminently just and kind-hearted, especially good to the poor, who in every right cause found him a strong champion. No man in Worcester was more looked up to and respected; and at public meetings his few quiet words had more weight than the longer sentences of others. Those were not days

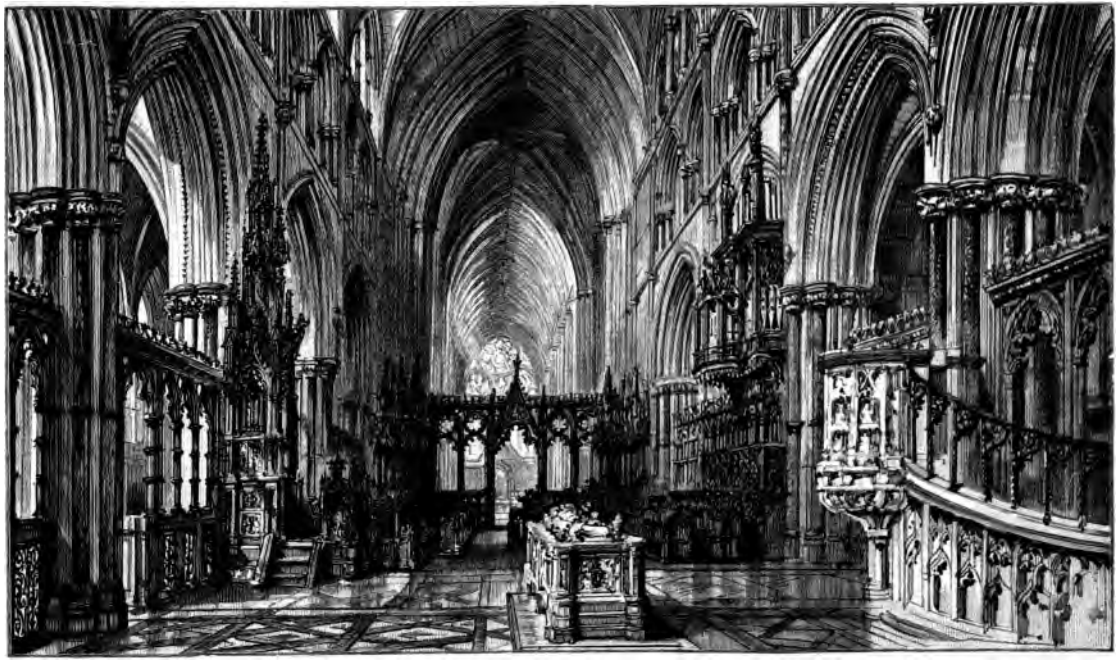
when the labouring classes were gaining the upper hand, and nothing roused the spirit within Mr. Price so much as the righteous complaint of the working people. Consequently he was the most popular of men, and could rule where others failed. Many a trouble was quelled at the rising by his influence: a voice never raised, a hand never stretched out. So much was this the case that his power was scarcely realised; it told imperceptibly; he was so seldom seen, went so little amongst them, said so little when he did appear, that even the men themselves scarcely knew how much they valued and regarded him.

One secret of his influence was his singular good sense and clear judgment, inherited from his father. Although his mind was highly cultivated, he must sometimes have felt that his faculties were wasted in things beneath them. A university career, where he might have taken honours and spent his days in the intellectual atmosphere for which Nature meant him—this is what ought to have been. He had only to stretch out his hand and take it, and would have done so but for that want of ambition and energy. He lived in a world of his own, revelling in solitude and contemplation, his mental gifts sufficient for him; every moment of the time not due to business was spent in the atmosphere of his well-chosen library.

It seems almost a pity that he had wealth and work to inherit; that he was an only child; for energy and exertion were thus rendered unnecessary. He was able to supply all his simple tastes, to surround himself with luxuries he never cared for, and to indulge in all the refinements that he loved.

With such a nature Ellen Price's earlier years were passed: the years after she left her grandmother's home, up to the time of her marriage. Her father was exactly the man, and possessed exactly the mind, to strengthen the good seed already in her heart. All his refinement and intellectual attainments found an immediate response in her own sensitive and sympathetic temperament. At all periods of her life she placed high ideals before her; and here, during her most impressionable years, she dwelt under the wing and shadow of one who fulfilled her loftiest aspirations. The *Times*, in reviewing *East Lynne*, said they had never before met an authoress so capable of delineating with a few strokes of the pen the portraits and characters of men, and of *noble* men; but the faculty was being trained from the days of her youth; it grew with her growth, until it became a part of herself.

Much of her talent must have been inherited from her father. He never wrote: few wrote in those days who did not feel within them the sacred fire of inspiration; it was supposed to be an inborn gift, just as much as music or painting or any other of the divine arts: but he was of an original and very thoughtful turn of mind. His thoroughness, wide reading, powers of applying himself to mental work—all this was in singular contrast to the want of physical energy and activity which distinguished him throughout life. Had he lived in the Middle Ages he would have been a hermit devoted to contemplation; or, turning alchemist, he would have sought with nervous zeal the secrets of science and nature. Born under the influence of the eighteenth century, he became nothing but a quiet scholar who had very



WORCESTER CATHEDRAL.

much mistaken his vocation, and in consequence, if we err not, was never quite the thoroughly happy and satisfied man he might have been under other circumstances.

All his earnestness of purpose and high sense of duty equally characterised his daughter Ellen; and it is because we feel how much she owed to her father, how much she inherited from him, both in mental and moral qualities, that we dwell upon the character of Mr. Price. With her, Nature had been more prodigal in gifts; and the faculties which were wanting in the father to make him a great man were bestowed upon the child. She had singular nervous energy, which would never allow her to rest satisfied without attaining to great things; and this, combined with untiring powers of application, carried her safely and successfully through years of earnest work and deferred hope.

She possessed also what perhaps was the strongest and certainly the highest faculty within her—an eminently spiritual nature, to which everything else was subservient. Devotion was her first duty; quiet, simple, and unobtrusive; never talked about, never paraded: for she ever felt that utterance made all feeling commonplace, and the deepest subjects were too sacred for words. No doubt this also was innate; Heaven's best gift was not denied to one who ever seemed under its special protection. With all truth and reverence it may be said that throughout life the hand of God was upon her, and she was ever in His keeping. "Thou shalt hide me under the shadow of Thy wings, and I shall be safe from fear of evil." Such might have been the motto of all Mrs. Henry Wood's days; and, unless the succeeding

pages fail in their object, this fact must become abundantly evident.

From her earliest years she was brought up in a sacred atmosphere. Her first recollections, we have seen, were the outlines of the Cathedral under whose shadow she dwelt, for her grandfather's house was either in the Close or very near to it. Her first remembered sounds were the sweet College bells ringing for service. From her nursery window her attendant would hold her up to watch the people passing on their way to and from the College services with grave and reverent step. A little later in the day her grandmother was in the habit of taking her out and pacing the quiet, deserted, beautiful cloisters. She would talk of the happy dead resting there; would point to the strange gravestone with its sad inscription "Miserrimus," and say to the wondering, impressionable child that one lay there whose life must have been all sorrow and suffering—perhaps one who had wasted his days in sin, which at last had brought him to realise that such a life must ever end in such an epitaph. Or again, perhaps one who had only suffered through the sins of others, himself good and righteous. It all read the same lesson, whatever the cause for the inscription, that sin ended in sorrow.

And the child would look up with earnest eyes, and contemplate the gravestone—which ever after held a fascination for her—with thoughts beyond her years. We do not think there was ever a time when she resolved *to be* good, to choose the better part; goodness was part of her character, and it became more confirmed with her growth. She possessed a singularly self-contained nature and disciplined mind. But

we shall see that quietness and contemplation and a life of thought were very early forced upon her.

After these quiet walks and talks in the solitary cloisters—a great contrast to the hour when the College boys, released from school, would invade the sacred precincts and make them echo with their noise—the grandmother would enter the Cathedral and pace its equally deserted aisles, impressing upon the child that they were now in the house of God; that here they were on holy ground, and here they came to worship Him. And Sunday after Sunday, when still too young to realise or take part in the service, she would be taken to their own pew, which immediately faced that of the Dean's family.

One thing that in those days charmed and delighted her was the wonderful east window, which had no special design, but was a kaleidoscope of ancient glass of many rich tints. Her gaze would often wander to this marvellous vision, attracted by beauty of colouring. We do not know whether the window still remains, or has given place to something modern and inferior. Sometimes it would be difficult to draw her away from the fascination. Service ended, the magnificent organ would roll its volume of sound through roof and arches, and many of the congregation would pace the aisles whilst the player extended his voluntary beyond the utmost limits, and the bedesmen would wax impatient and think it hard that they should be kept from their Sunday dinner; but the pacing congregation, and the sweet notes of the organ, and the strains of Beethoven and Handel were as nothing to the little child in comparison with the wonderful colours of that

east window. All through life Mrs. Henry Wood retained her love for old stained glass, and was ever reverently susceptible to the charm of harmonious tones.

She had inherited her father's artistic taste, and in earlier years painted in water-colours, loving to form and sketch her own groups. Her artistic eye in placing flowers, whether to decorate a table or a room, was a talent in itself, and a rare one. In later years her drawing-rooms in France were always beautiful with a profusion of blossoms and ferns, that threw a charm over the rooms such as few others possessed. Generally she attended to her own flowers, and it was always a labour of love; but if for some reason they had been changed by the housekeeper, she would presently go round the rooms, and quickly transform what before had been very inartistically arranged.

THE FRATERY, WORCESTER CATHEDRAL.

CHAPTER III

" Come Time, and teach me, many years,
I do not suffer in a dream ;
For now so strange do these things seem,
Mine eyes have leisure for their tears."

"MISERRIMUS."

WE have spoken of Mr. Price, and must not omit some mention of his wife ; for Mrs. Henry Wood's talent seemed inherited from both parents : the deeper qualities from the father, all the vivacity and ease from the mother.

Mrs. Price was in all things the exact opposite to her husband. In appearance she was extremely pretty ; small and fairy-like, with dark flashing eyes, a wealth of dark

curling hair, a very pink and white complexion. The portrait we are able to give of her was painted when she was about forty years old, and the bloom of youth had faded. Moreover it was taken immediately after a dangerous illness, when she had been very near to the gates of death. The face was somewhat drawn, the perfect oval had fallen in, the features looked exaggerated. Nevertheless the likeness was thought good. In her movements she was light and graceful; active and energetic, but a little wanting in repose. Like many little women, she was fond of ruling and of having her own way, and her quiet husband allowed her in most things to do as she pleased. Year after year passed, and Mr. and Mrs. Price remained the excellent friends husband and wife ought to be; but it grew into an understood thing that his study must not be too often invaded, and he gradually withdrew more and more into its seclusion. Within that sanctum his daughter Ellen, and she alone, always found a welcome and a sure resting-place; and there much of their time would be spent reading and conversing, discussing books, playing chess, happy in each other's society.

Into much of Mr. Price's inner life his wife could not enter; not from want of mental power, for she was as well educated and intelligent as most women, but from want of sympathy. She had nothing of the contemplative about her. Though a woman of vivid imagination, there was little in her of the dreamer. Passionately devoted to her husband, she yet never sought to identify herself with his intellectual pursuits. Her pleasure lay in ruling her household, in receiving friends, in knowing everything that was going on in the world, and,

as far as she could, influencing the little realm around her; loving to feel herself a necessity, and that without her the earth would cease to move. She delighted to talk, and she talked well. Her conversation was witty and vivacious; and, whatever the society she was in, she must be its leading movement and shining light. As Montaigne has said of another, she would have taken upon herself the negotiations of the world, and found her happiness in doing so.

A great deal may be said for and against such a temperament. Mrs. Price was actuated by excellent principles; her desire was to set the world to rights; a state of paradise or a millennium would have charmed her, always supposing her to be a chief ministering spirit. But these natures in their anxiety to do good often do a great deal of harm. The world refuses to be set to rights after their pattern, and those who give themselves this impossible task disturb much outward and inward harmony.

It followed that upon her first-born daughter Ellen it was impossible that she could have any great influence. The active temperament which must be the Prime Minister of her little kingdom was out of touch with the thoughtful girl whose happiness lay in rest and repose, in reading and study, in spending all the time permitted in her father's library: a delightful haven of refuge from the outside world; even from the more bustling parts of the house, where other children, as they appeared and began to grow up and assert themselves, brought with them all the reposeless atmosphere in which children of all ages have their being.

Yet there was always the charm of beauty about Mrs.

Price, and though her voice was seldom silent, it was sweet. She had been brought up in a home where the word of one was the law of the household. Her father, one of the finest men of his time — he was six feet seven inches high — was violent and overbearing in temper. He would brook no contradiction; and the gentle spirit of his wife had soon learned that passive obedience and non-resistance must be her refuge. A tyrant in his own house, he was not beloved within it, and was feared outside it.

His two daughters naturally stood in awe of him, and contradiction was never attempted. For his son he made home so uncomfortable that he went out to India, and died there. A journey to India a century ago was a very different matter from what it is to-day, and meant greater exile; to those left behind it seemed a parting for ever—as it proved to be in this instance. The mother's heart was broken; her son had been the one hope and consolation in her repressed life, as only sons often are, no matter how numerous the daughters; and she seldom smiled after her dear James left her. He was a young man of much ability and promise, and with his departure went out the light and sunshine of the home.

Yet, strange as it may seem, this tyrant, who made every one so uncomfortable and unhappy, was greatly attached in his own way to his wife and children. Indulged and spoilt in his youth, accustomed to being made first from childhood upwards and to having his own will in all things, he was eminently selfish. The child was father to the man; he grew up violent in temper, passionate in spirit. But in his own

Mrs PRICE

(THE MOTHER OF Mrs HENRY WOOD)

From a miniature by Smeaton

peculiar way he was sternly just, meting out to every man his exact due; only withholding in his own home the affection and consideration equally its right.

His two daughters were very pretty girls, and were known far and wide as "the beautiful Miss Evanses." Both were extremely amiable; the one inheriting her father's love of ruling, though with none of his unsociable and violent qualities; the other, like her mother, letting the world have its way, "laughed and bid it pass." Many suitors came, only to be summarily dismissed by the father, who declared that his daughters should never marry. At length in this matter they took the law into their own hands. When their hearts fell captive, love gave courage to the occasion: and Miss Elizabeth Evans became Mrs. Thomas Price. Her sister soon followed her example, and the old home was left with only the parent birds.

We do not know whether the change softened the iron-willed father, and made him more tender and considerate towards the lonely and subdued wife. Even so, he had not very long wherein to make atonement. Soon after the marriage of his second daughter—who was even more attractive than Mrs. Price, and owned the dark violet eyes that are so rare, but that once seen can never be forgotten—he was drowned; thus coming to a violent end, even as he had lived a stormy life.

We have said that life with Mrs. Price was no visionary thing, but on the contrary a very active reality. Yet she was a woman of strong imagination. She also sometimes had remarkable dreams, and on one occasion at least saw what is vulgarly

called a ghost. Or perhaps it might rather be termed an apparition, for it was the manifestation of a person at the moment of death.

Taking a quiet country walk one spring morning, she passed through the very field in which a few years before her little daughter Ellen had been placed in such jeopardy by the deceitful bull and Mrs. Tipton's indiscretion. One of her servants was to be married that morning. She had lived for some years with her mistress, was devoted to her, and had long debated in her own mind whether to give up her comfortable home for the uncertainties of matrimony and the perfidious possibilities of mankind. As usual, matrimony won the day. She had been an excellent servant; her mistress had taken much interest in her, and was sorry to part with her; though faithful servants who identified themselves with the household were in those days not few and far between. The maid's name was Betty; and Betty went back to her mother's cottage to prepare for the great occasion and spend some last days in the old home.

It was the wedding morning; but as Mrs. Price went through the fields she was not at that moment thinking of her late handmaiden. Suddenly raising her eyes, to her astonishment she saw Betty sitting upon the stile in her wedding clothes—the attire and bonnet given her for the occasion—pressing her hand to her side. At that moment she ought to have been in church standing at the altar, and Mrs. Price felt a little bewildered. "Betty, why are you there? What are you doing?" she called.

There was no response. For a moment Mrs. Price withdrew her eyes, and when she looked again the figure had vanished. Supposing her to be on the other side the hedge, her mistress, still more bewildered, hastened onwards. There was no Betty anywhere, either this side the hedge or the other. Unable to fathom the mystery, she determined to go to Betty's cottage, which was about two miles away. There she found trouble; the mother overwhelmed, the bridegroom inconsolable. When dressed for church and about to start, Betty had suddenly pressed her hand to her side, and calling out, "O mother! mother!" had dropped lifeless from disease of the heart. It was at this moment that she had appeared to her mistress sitting on the distant stile. Poor Betty was now lying on her bed in the stillness of death, dressed as her mistress had seen her, excepting that the wedding bonnet had been removed.

We give this as an authentic record of an apparition, a fact not to be disputed. Those who are sceptical upon these points must explain the circumstance to their own satisfaction, if they can do so.

But Mrs. Price had many supernatural and spiritualistic experiences. With dreams that came true she was also occasionally visited. The following is a single instance, and one of the most simple.

She dreamed one night that she was standing on a vast and solitary plain, nothing before her but a level surface bounded by the horizon. Some distance behind her was an immense mass of precipitous rock which seemed to tower to the clouds. In the centre was a cavernous opening, a species of immense

portal; and within it a mysterious darkness no human eye could penetrate. In the sky of her dream a strange light threw its reflection upon the wide plain, and she seemed to recognise it as "the light that never was on land or sea." Suddenly across the plain she saw three figures advancing, one behind the other, walking slowly but steadily, as though nothing could turn aside their footsteps or arrest their progress; there was a destiny to be fulfilled. As they approached she recognised two of them as near relatives, the third a friend about to become connected with her by marriage. All three looked solemn and serious.

Then, in her dream, she beckoned to the first and pointed to the portal. He hesitated a moment, went on, and passed into the impenetrable darkness. She knew she should see him no more. In like manner she beckoned to the second and pointed to the portal, and he too passed out of mortal sight; and so with the third. She remained standing alone upon the plain, gazing sadly at the dark opening. "I too," she murmured, "must pass through, but not yet." The words seemed not her own, but suggested. When she awoke she distinctly remembered her dream, and related it to her husband. He had no sympathy with dreams and ghosts, and all the supernatural elements that follow in their train. And when his wife ended by saying, "Thomas, you will see that those three will soon die," he simply replied, "My dear, I think you should pay no regard to these things." Yet it is certain that within a few months the three men seen in her dream died one after the other, and in the order in which they had passed into the darkness.

The whole colouring and surrounding of the dream was so singularly borne out by subsequent facts, that one hesitates to say there was nothing of the supernatural about it. Mrs. Price had many such dreams; and it would seem there are persons to whom the veil dividing the material from the spiritual world is partially withdrawn, so that they obtain glimpses others can never see, and are susceptible to influences others can never feel. It appears evident that some are in closer contact with the "things unseen" than others.

With all her love of ruling and undue attention to small things, Mrs. Price had a high tone of mind; was almost "unjustly just"; literally, as well as figuratively, censuring others by the dignity of excelling, insisting upon perfection, and of course never meeting with it; often discouraging by fault-finding, rather than helping others by praise and forbearance to "rise on stepping-stones of their dead selves to higher things." She was very quick; all fire and intelligence; not always weighing her words, which often went deeper than she intended. Yet there was a great deal of the spiritual about her. She also possessed a keen sense of humour and of the pathetic.

Mrs. Price lived to a great age, and with her the evening of life was calm. Sorrow and trial had been largely her portion. Yet she retained her activity to the end. When past eighty years of age she would walk about the Malvern Hills as brightly and briskly as ever; small and thin and somewhat frail, she knew nothing of the "weight of years." She was very proud of her daughter's reputation. In those days life for her was comparatively over; all its activity had

departed; her love of ruling and power, her desire to set the world to rights, had ceased. "My greatest pleasure now," she would say, "is to be alone, to shut myself into my sitting-room with one of my daughter's books. At once I feel myself in another world, surrounded by a crowd of familiar friends; and they are as real to me as if they actually existed."

She would take some of the credit to herself. "It is my opinion," she would say laughingly, "that talent is a good deal inherited from the mother, and that I by no means count for nothing in this matter. I quite think that if I had tried to write when I was young, I should have succeeded. I often find my brain weaving stories and plots, and could almost imagine them realities."

One of her great friends was Mrs. Benson, wife of Dr. Benson, one time Master of the Temple and Canon of Worcester. We have before us a copy of an old edition of Milton once given by Mrs. Benson to Mrs. Price, and long, long afterwards passed on to us by the latter, who parted with it as with a treasure. We mention the fact because Canon Benson greatly influenced Mrs. Henry Wood's earlier years, and she ever spoke of him in terms of affection. The months when he was in residence were to her some of the happiest of the year. He would not have been very many hours within the precincts of the Cathedral before they met; and once more she would be charmed with the quiet, earnest tones, the sweet voice and gentle bearing, always singularly subdued, but full of purpose. He was exactly the sort of man who

formed one of her ideals — grave, courtly, quiet, earnest and devoted; a scholar, and a preacher of rare eloquence. Whenever he was in residence people flocked from far and near to hear him. The College gates were besieged long before the hour of service. Aisles were thronged, and even the pulpit stairs were occupied, so that people had to come down and make way for the preacher to ascend. All sects and denominations would be there: dissenters; others who never went anywhere at other times; even Quakers, who would never enter the Cathedral on ordinary occasions, scarcely dare to do so, under penalty of a rebuke at "Meeting." His preaching was the quietest, calmest, most earnest that could be conceived; precisely the oratory that most impressed Mrs. Henry Wood. Such a voice as his was seldom heard; it was harmony and music, so clear and distinct that its softest whisper could be heard by the whole congregation. He had one affliction. In later life he became so deaf that he could not even hear the organ in church; and when reading the Commandments, a sign had to be made when the response ceased and it was time to go on. It was a common saying that it was difficult to decide which was the sweeter and more musical—his clear voice, or the soft flute notes of the instrument.

Another Cathedral dignitary in those days very much influenced her life and mind—Dr. Murray, then Dean of Worcester and at the same time Bishop of Rochester: for they were days of pluralities. He was a handsome and dignified man, and carried an atmosphere of dignity into all his domestic relations.

Amongst such people and surroundings Ellen Price's early life was passed; it is this life which she loves to introduce into so many of her works. In none is it more conspicuous than in the work that was appearing at the time of her death —*Lady Grace;* though a comparatively short story. One feels that it is drawn from life; that the people had an existence; nothing is invented excepting plot, situations, and incident; even in these we know not where reality ends and fiction begins. Cathedral atmosphere, cathedral people, cathedral prejudices—these were a part of herself, influencing mind and thought. With these she was identified. She delighted in the smallest details of this life as much as in its broad outlines and deeper realities.

POWYKE BRIDGE, WORCESTER.

CHAPTER IV

" In words, like weeds, I'll wrap me o'er,
Like coarsest clothes against the cold :
But that large grief which these enfold
Is given in outline and no more."

FRIAR STREET, WORCESTER.

ELLEN PRICE early began to learn the lessons of endurance which life teaches to most of us. "In your patience possess ye your souls." Through suffering she was to obtain this patience, and to be made yet more perfect.

At the age of thirteen a delicacy began to show itself. Something was wrong with the spine : no organic disease, but a weakness which eventually produced a serious curvature.

In these days probably all might have been rectified, the wrong put right; but seventy years ago the science of medicine and surgery was in a very elementary condition; doctors were still groping in the dark, asking of each other the origin of life, the mystery of disease and death. All that was known was applied to the delicate child; all that could be done was done; nothing availed; it seemed that a life of more or less pain and weakness was to be her lot. Her days were now passed on a reclining board or couch, from which she seldom moved. More than ever she became the companion of her father in his study, and probably more than ever dear to his heart. Her hold on life seemed to be relaxing, and we prize most that we are about to lose. Reading and study, always her great pleasure, became her chief resource. Probably in these days she applied herself too closely to work; but surrounded by her books she was always happy, and her gentle father, erring himself on the same side, was the last to restrain her.

Her mind grew and expanded, but its development was no doubt at the expense of physical power. As delicacy increased, so did the singular beauty of the face: a beauty difficult to describe, and quite apart from mere perfection of feature. Perhaps the word *ethereal* will give the best idea of its character, for it was like a perfume. We inhale the scent of the rose, we know it is there and delights us, but we cannot grasp or describe it. Equally subtle was the charm of Ellen Price. This remained to the end. Even in hours of illness and suffering it never forsook her. Her face was without line or wrinkle or sign of age to the last. A description by an

unknown writer at the time of her death is as true as anything that could be said. Whoever the writer was, he must have known her well. "You can almost see the spirit itself of Mrs. Henry Wood shining through the frail, I had almost said diaphanous body, and exquisite face. One never grows familiar with the sight, and it rivets and charms one more and more; for she possesses a sparkling intellect and a heart of gold."

The face was a pure oval, singularly refined: that perfect outline so rarely found. A straight, delicate nose; teeth white and even; a charming mouth betraying at once the sensitive sympathy and steadfastness of her disposition; firm as well as sweet. Her head was well set upon the shoulders; small, excepting where the intellectual faculties were largely but not prominently developed. Her eyes were brown, large and brilliant, and seemed to read your inmost thoughts. One felt that everything had to be told; if only half a thought were spoken, she would divine the remainder.

Though she had a keen sense of wit and humour, in quiet moments her eyes were rather distinguished by sadness, as though the mind were occupied with the momentous issues of life, and found there much cause for sorrow and thought. Her prevailing expression was one of absolute repose; no doubt partly the result of a life lived to a great extent in the retirement of her study. When writing became a serious occupation, her strength did not admit of anything else. Even after a quiet evening with friends she occasionally suffered from nervous exhaustion that almost felt like death

itself. At such times she could only lie back in her chair, her eyes closed, a soft flush upon her face, until rest restored her. Fortunately she had a great reserve of vital power.

But her calmness and serenity in a great measure came from within. Her whole life, with its cares, responsibilities, and joys, was taken to a higher Refuge than any to be found on earth, and there rested in perfect trust. One of her favourite hymns was Cowper's "God moves in a mysterious way," especially the verse—

> "Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
> The clouds ye so much dread
> Are big with mercy, and shall break
> In blessings on your head."

In her saddest hours she acted up to this, in the letter and in the spirit. Nay, it seemed the greater the trouble, the firmer her faith.

From the age of thirteen to seventeen most of her life was spent upon her reclining couch. No doubt this very much helped to bend her mind in the direction it was to take, just as Scott's long illness about the same age developed his own powers of romance. It also largely gave her that matured habit of thought and judgment which afterwards distinguished her.

At the age of seventeen the curvature became confirmed and settled; she was pronounced cured; that is, she ceased to suffer. Nothing more could be done; it was no longer necessary to be always reclining; but the defect was there. In earlier life it was not very apparent; the curvature was *inward*, not outward—less conspicuous but more fatal.

At first very little seemed wrong with the figure, saving that she remained small and short, her height never exceeding five feet. But, the spine excepted, she was so perfectly formed that her movements were graceful and dignified, and caused her to look taller than she really was. Her constitution was remarkably sound, but henceforth the body was to be frail, delicate, without muscular power. She could never raise the most ordinary weight, or carry anything heavier than a small book or a parasol.

But who shall measure the pain to the sensitive spirit, when, growing into womanhood, she realised that she was never to be quite as others: with all her love of beauty and perfection, she herself in form was never to be perfect? It was more or less a lifelong sorrow. To these highly-strung temperaments, shrinking in acute self-consciousness from the slightest pity, the knowledge of a personal defect brings suffering none can realise who are not similarly constituted. Of Lord Byron it was said that his deformity changed the whole course of his life, affecting all his mental and moral disposition; and probably it was so. With Ellen Price it certainly added greatly to her sensitiveness, and caused her to be painfully conscious of remark. She felt that, disguise it as she would, she must pass through life with a defect which must be ever more or less apparent. Her refinement and imagination only exaggerated the evil. It really was no evil whatever; was never in the least degree unsightly, never took from her gracefulness; but she did not think so, and could not be made to think so, and the defect assumed undue proportions. She never spoke of it—prob-

ably never could have spoken of it; but we know how she felt it, and in one of her characters one gathers what it was to herself. Lucy Cheveley, in *Mildred Arkell*, might almost have been the counterpart of Mrs. Henry Wood, as she is there described; and we may be sure that the sensitive pain attributed to Lucy Cheveley was written from the experience and emotions of the author.

The cause of this spinal failure was never quite known. It may have owed its foundation to Mrs. Tipton's throwing the child over the hedge to save her from a still worse evil. Or it may have been inborn, only waiting time for development. The strength and activity of the brain may have proved too much for the weaker physical powers. Many writers have suffered in the same way. It was said by one who had been intimate with all three, that if you followed Miss Mitford, Mrs. Barrett Browning, and Mrs. Henry Wood, the ladies walking side by side, you could scarcely have told one from the other, so much alike were their figures.

We can speak of a fourth from experience—Julia Kavanagh. She once told us that in early life she suffered exactly as Mrs. Wood had suffered; but she was even smaller and shorter, and the mischief in her case was more evident.

With her also it may have had something to do with her singular death. For long she had suffered from constant neuralgia, and leaving Paris, where she and her mother had lived for many years, they went to Nice and made it their home, hoping illness would yield to the softer climate. It only grew worse, though her health seemed otherwise perfect, and she continued to write. She was still only in middle-age.

One morning, about three o'clock, her mother heard a sound in her daughter's room as of a fall. Hastening in, she found her lying upon the floor, but quite conscious.

"O mamma," she laughed, speaking in French, their habitual language, "how foolish I am to have fallen. And the strange thing is that I do not know why I am out of bed or how I got here."

"My dear," said the alarmed mother, "do you feel ill?"

"I feel perfectly well," returned Julia Kavanagh. "And I cannot imagine what brings me here."

But at five o'clock that afternoon the gentle spirit passed away, apparently for no physical reason; the doctors could call it nothing but a *crise nerveuse.* Mrs. Kavanagh, herself aged and nearly blind, never recovered the blow. Though she lived on for many years, she scarcely ever smiled again; and her daughter's image seemed never absent from her thoughts. The life of the mother had been unusually sad and unhappy, and her daughter was the one bright spot in her existence, her constant, close companion, with kindred intellectual tastes —for Mrs. Kavanagh also was a woman of great imagination and wrote charming fairy tales.

Julia Kavanagh's deformity was very apparent, but she was one of the most delightful, gentle, and intellectual of women. The lower part of her face was uninteresting; the jaw massive and powerful; the upper part beautiful. "The intellectual faculties largely developed—and no doubt the moral also," said Charlotte Brontë, looking steadfastly at her the first evening they ever met—at Thackeray's house in London: a remark Julia Kavanagh thought somewhat singular. Never-

theless it was true. She too had large wonderful brown eyes, with a singular softness and sweetness about them, through which one saw shining a spirit of purity and earnest devotion: a certain sadness also, as if she knew that, not being as others, she was cut off from their fate and fortune, and the love dramas and earthly happiness she was so fond of describing could never be hers. To a casual observer her face remained plain, with its dark brown complexion; it was only when you came to talk to her that you saw its beauty—the fine eyes, the noble expression, the magnificent head crowned with massive coils of rich black hair.

Probably she also felt keenly her deformity, for it was very conspicuous. And as human nature always wishes for the impossible, and those joys seem brightest and best which are never to be ours, so Julia Kavanagh may have felt a longing for the closest of earthly companionship, for ever denied to her. In many a short poem, such as the following, she would express her thoughts and emotions: poems unknown to the world, but possessing sweetness and sadness; that, above all, are suggestive.

"I do not love, yet there are days
When, if I hear a footstep come,
My heart will beat;
When with bent ear and dreamy gaze,
For what I know not, nor for whom,
I sit and wait.

"I do not love, but there are nights
When my soul melts in thought so sweet
I cannot sleep;
When my heart throbs with vague delights,
That with vague sorrows blend and meet,
Until I weep.

"I do not love, but morns there are
That in my soul a sunshine make,
And seem to say,
'Thy life will boast another star—
A loved and unknown voice shall wake
Thy heart to-day.'

"Alas! that blest mood may not last;
Though step should come I heed it not;
Cold grows my heart.
Love, dost thou come and go so fast,
And art thou, Love, as soon forgot,
As cold depart?"

The first three verses show longing and capacity for affection; the last and somewhat vague verse, the folly of hopeless desires. Had Julia Kavanagh cultivated the talent she might have taken rank as a poetess, for she possessed a true poetic touch; but writing was not only a labour of love with her, it was a necessity. By it she made a lifelong home both for her mother and herself; and perhaps the most beautiful trait in their lives was their utter devotion to each other. They both sleep in the cemetery at Nice, overlooking the blue waters of the Mediterranean, beneath a white canopy of marble—a magnificent monument which was raised by the mother to the memory of the daughter, and for which she denied herself all luxuries. It might truly be said of them as of Saul and Jonathan, that "lovely in their lives, in their deaths they were not divided." For although Mrs. Kavanagh lived some years after her daughter, her spirit ever seemed anticipating the moment of reunion.

After Julia Kavanagh's death her mother sent to the writer, as remembrances of a very close friendship, many of her MS. poems,

which had never seen daylight; poems tender and true, full of passionate longing for the beautiful and the eternal. Equally charming were many water-colour sketches of lovely scenes taken by Julia Kavanagh during their residence in the Two Sicilies, proving how diversified was her talent; whilst a book of devotions sent with them was illuminated by her with a skill worthy of the monks of old. The possession of exceptional powers too often seems purchased at the expense of physical strength. Exertion becomes impossible. It was so with Julia Kavanagh and with Mrs. Henry Wood; we know that it was so with Mrs. Barrett Browning, and it may have been so with Miss Mitford. With Mrs. Wood the frailty of the body was so great that every word of *East Lynne*, and of many of her novels, was written in a reclining chair, her manuscript upon her knees.

OMBERSLEY.

CHAPTER V

"That loss is common would not make
My own less bitter, rather more:
Too common! Never morning wore
To evening, but some heart did break."

WITTINGTON.

WHEN Ellen Price was passing out of childhood into the sweet days of "maiden meditation," trouble visited her home. Not the overwhelming trouble that has come to so many homes in the world, when they have had to be broken up, their members scattered abroad, and the places that knew them know them no more; nothing of this serious nature; yet trouble sufficient to make a marked change in the life of

the sensitive girl, whose only care hitherto had been the spinal delicacy from which she had slowly and only partially recovered.

It was about this time that Huskisson with his ideas upon free trade opened the British ports for the introduction of foreign goods. The immediate effect upon English glove manufacturers was disastrous, and is too well known to need description here. Men of limited works and means were ruined and disappeared at once and for ever. Others, more wealthy, kept on, hoping against hope, only to disappear in their turn. Those who weathered the storm did so at immense sacrifices.

Amongst the last was Mr. Price. We have said that he was ever considerate towards those who had no resisting powers of their own. He was now to prove the reality of his sympathies by a severe test.

As soon as the ports were opened, Mr. Price, from a worldly point of view, would have done well to close his works and retire; his fortune was large. But nothing was further from his intention. To discharge his men in the present crisis was to consign them to the poverty now reigning in Worcester. It was also supposed that as soon as the evil was realised the ports would be closed again; but for years the manufacturers went on hoping against hope. In that crisis numberless weeks passed, and Mr. Price lost, week by week, a sum that in itself was a small fortune: preferring to do this rather than sacrifice his workpeople. Matters had grown more and more serious around them, and thousands of working men and women were starving. Huskisson saw his

mistake when it was too late. Even then it was not at once rectified, and though it had been, ruined masters could not be restored to prosperity. Numberless operatives were scattered over the land, finding other occupations, or dying of despair and want. Mr. Price felt the blow keenly, but was not overwhelmed. Yet he paid a great price for this generous conduct, for when the crisis was over he thought it right to diminish his household and live in a simpler manner than of old. The wealth lost was never recovered. The home was still happy and abundant; it was a mere question of degree; in comparison with the ruin around there was every cause for gratitude. But it was a great sacrifice, and had the struggle continued very much longer, it is questionable how far it would have been justified. Mr. Price enjoyed that earthly blessing, an easy competency, to the last; but it was all very different from what had once been.

Probably few living remember the devastation and ruin that came at this time to many of the manufacturing towns of England. In *Mrs. Halliburton's Troubles* Mrs. Henry Wood has given a detailed description of the industries, their ways and works; and in *Mildred Arkell* — more especially the chapter headed "A City's Desolation" — she has described the hopelessness that fell upon so many when the ports were opened.

All this trouble only drew the father and daughter more closely together. She was of an age now to enter into his deeper thoughts and sympathise with his cares. Their readings took a higher flight, and she had gained a good deal of classical knowledge. The foundation of

this had been laid in bygone evenings, when the father would have before him his young sons—some of the College boys Mrs. Henry Wood describes so vividly—and help them in their Latin and Greek difficulties. The daughter was always present on these occasions, and very soon knew more of the dead languages than her brothers. Nothing else was taught in the College School in those days; for English and accomplishments the boys had masters at home.

Father and daughter had many a long and anxious conversation upon the falling houses and crumbling fortunes around them, the suffering and privations of the working classes, an evil too great for private charity. That those times and evils sank deeply into the heart of Ellen Price is proved by the vivid pictures she drew of them more than thirty years after they had passed away. There was also her memory to trust to, which as we have said was remarkable. She never forgot a person once met or a story once heard. Many of those around her had marvellous and romantic histories, every detail of which was remembered without effort. It was the same with all whom she only knew by report. She could go through hundreds of histories in this manner, and years afterwards would remember names, places, and details of people with whom she had never come into contact. No doubt this was of great use to her in later life, and caused her to work fact and fiction together in that singular way which makes her novels dramas of real life, so that, as the *Athenæum* once said: "*The power to draw minutely and carefully each character with characteristic individuality in word and action is Mrs. Henry Wood's especial gift. This*

endows her pages with a vitality which carries the reader to the end, and leaves him with a feeling that the veil which in real life separates man from man has been raised, and that he has for once seen and known certain people as intimately as if he had been their guardian angel. This is a great fascination."

But this sweet companionship was about to be interrupted for ever. Time was steadily flowing on, and bringing its inevitable changes. Ellen Price had grown to young womanhood, her earnest, thoughtful eyes occupied with the mysterious problems of life; herself conscious of all the issues of existence for good or ill; keenly alive to personal responsibility and influence. She had had two homes, and was soon to have a third.

There had been the first home with the gentle and refined grandmother, the grandfather who too soon had passed out of existence. This had lasted for seven years, and in after days Mrs. Henry Wood was wont to say that every seven years brought some important change in her life. It was so until seven times seven years had passed away; after which life to the end flowed on in an even current, still marked by many cares and sorrows, but no dramatic changes.

Next there had been the life in her own home; companionship with the beloved father: year after year growing dearer to him as mind and spirit developed. There had been the long, careful training of the intellect; years of quiet study with her governess, and frequent escape in the father's sanctum; ending as the years went on in becoming his almost constant charge and companion. There had been the years of

delicacy and enforced bodily inactivity, terminating as we have seen. There had come the sad crisis when the English ports were opened, and all her keen sympathies, all her capacities for sorrow and suffering were drawn out towards those in despair and desolation around her; the interior abundance of her own home only making the exterior misery more vividly realised.

All this life, this home life, this cathedral life, associated with her earliest recollections and affections, entwined about her heart-strings for all time, was to be interrupted and given up. The whole scene and current of her existence was to undergo a complete change. Other tongues were to sound in her ears, and faces never before seen, and manners and customs hitherto unfamiliar, were now to take the place of people and places which had made her earthly happiness.

Had she quite realised all the transition meant, would she have found courage to take the step? Perhaps it is doubtful; but whether the cost was counted, the step was taken, and Ellen Price became Mrs. Henry Wood. It was perhaps no marvel where the courage came from, for her husband was one of the handsomest and most charming of men. The portrait given of Mr. Wood was taken shortly before his death, after the commencement of his last illness. That illness had changed him almost beyond recognition; he had suddenly passed from youth to age; but the fineness of the features and the intellectual development of the head are still evident, though the charm of youth has fled.

The scene of Mr. Henry Wood's life was laid abroad. The term sounds distant and formidable, but means nothing more

MR HENRY WOOD

Printed in Lace

remote than the south of France. Yet in those days it took as long to reach the Riviera by easy stages as it now takes to get to Egypt. Railways had not come into use, revolutionising the world with changes good and evil.

Mr. Wood was at the head of a large banking and shipping firm, and was in those days, though young, a man of wealth and influence. Later on, for a short time, and solely with the idea of being useful, and not for remuneration, he joined the Consular Service; and it was said by Lord Palmerston that he had never received such clear and satisfactory reports, such excellent suggestions, as those sent in by Mr. Henry Wood. So high an opinion had he of his abilities that he pressed him to take up a more public life. But this did not enter into Mr. Wood's ambitions, and he never did so. He retired early from work and activity, and died comparatively young.

In choosing his wife from Worcester, it was a singular coincidence that he was somewhat nearly related to one who bore his name and was for many years a Canon of Worcester Cathedral. Another coincidence was that in marrying Miss Price he was marrying into an old family name, though they were not in any way related. He was heir to a considerable property left by an ancestor named Price, who in 1741 went out to India as Governor of Surat, and died in 1780, leaving a large possession which, never claimed by his descendants, remained in the hands of the East India Company until it passed over to the Government, where it still remains.

On the morning of the marriage a slight but amusing incident occurred. It had somehow gone abroad that the marriage

would take place at St. Peter's Church, in the Faithful City, and at ten o'clock the church was crowded. Instead of which the carriages quietly drove off to Wittington, a pretty suburb of Worcester now given over to modern villas, where in presence of a few friends Miss Ellen Price and Mr. Henry Wood were made man and wife. The bride was dressed according to the fashion of the time in a white silk dress and white silk bonnet, trimmed with orange blossoms. Very often the brides of that day were married in their riding habits.

Mr. Henry Wood was a man of great powers of mind, but the exact opposite to his wife. Whilst she was full of romance and ideality, he had not a spark of imagination, scarcely any sympathy with the gift. In this one point they were not well matched. It was an effort to him to read a novel; poetry he never looked at; abstruse books of science were his delight. Yet in social life he was the gayest of the gay, the soul of wit and conversation; the leader of society; but—as time was to prove—possessing a mind a little wanting in ballast.

He had a great gift for languages and spoke several fluently, French especially. No Frenchman, hearing him for the first time, believed him anything but a fellow-countryman. And he possessed not only the gift of tongues, but of language: he was a first-rate public speaker, and a great politician on the Conservative side—although he managed to gain favour with Lord Palmerston.

He possessed another gift also, amounting to genius—that of medicine; loving it for its own sake. Out of pure devotion to the science, when he was about eighteen he walked the hospitals of London, performed operations, went through the

whole curriculum. And this not with any idea of practising, for he never practised, never intended to do so; he simply was happy in it. He was a great friend of the late Sir William Lawrence, who in the only illness he ever had—through being put into a damp bed—until his last and fatal malady, saved his life. He possessed all the strength of a man with the tenderness of a woman—gifts so wonderfully useful had he followed the profession for which Nature had most gifted him.

Though he never practised, perhaps one exception might be made to the assertion. As long as he lived no doctor was needed in his own house, as far as his children were concerned. This was fortunate, for, living abroad, they would otherwise in their childish illnesses have been at the mercy of the French physicians, who in those days as often killed as cured. It was, in fact, the fatal treatment of a French doctor which determined him for ever after to trust to himself rather than to them.

A little daughter fell ill with scarlet fever. Mr. Wood, then a young man, feared to trust himself with so much responsibility. He was passionately devoted to the child, who has been described as very sweet and lovely. People remarked that she was too good to live; and their prophecies were soon fulfilled.

The doctors treated her according to the fashion of the day. They first starved her almost to death, and, when she was sinking from exhaustion, ordered leeches to be applied to the throat. The faithful French head nurse, who was then a member of the household and has ever since belonged to it, a true and firm friend now of patriarchal age, protested in vain.

"Sir," she cried to her master in agonies of grief, "do not allow it. If leeches are used, the child will die. I know it from experience."

But she was powerless. The leeches were applied, the little throat closed up, and the child died. The father's sorrow was so great it was almost feared that he would die also. The faithful nurse was almost equally stricken. She was one of those strong and determined characters who must have their own way in everything: the under nurses had to obey her every look and word—even the mother's authority in the nursery was quite a secondary consideration.

But she was as tenacious in her affections as she was strong in character. None but herself was allowed to perform the last sad office for the pure and beautiful little creature who had gone to a better world. With her own hands she placed her in her little coffin, watched over it night and day until the little body was consigned to the earth and hidden away from mortal eyes for ever. There in a foreign grave she sleeps.

But Mr. Henry Wood had had enough of foreign doctors. The day his little daughter died his son was taken ill with the same fever. "This," he mournfully said, "shall be my care. Come what may, I will have no more French doctors in the house." And before long the child was well again and running about.

Years afterwards, when another daughter was born to them, Mr. Wood — who regarded his wife as a woman far above rubies, and ever thought the world contained none like her— insisted that the name Ellen should be repeated. His wife,

whose vivid imagination perhaps inclined her to superstition, hesitated. A compromise was at last agreed upon by the addition of Mary; and Ellen Mary she was christened. Had he been blessed with twelve daughters instead of two, probably every one of them, amongst other names, would have borne that of Ellen. Liquid and flowing, the name exactly suited Mrs. Henry Wood; expressing her own gentle, quiet, retiring nature.

It was about this time that Mrs. Wood—apart from the spinal trouble of her childhood—had her first and serious illness, during which for many months her life hung in the balance. After the birth of one of her children, she fell into a state of great delicacy and debility. The previous loss of her little daughter had proved a grief that had tried her much. When her strength failed, she found that she was unable to rally. Day by day the doctors watched her, and day by day they feared a decline. Her husband was in despair: to lose wife as well as child would have been overwhelming. Yet no care seemed to avail. Half his time was spent by her side, endeavouring to raise hope and courage. When she grew too weak to walk, none but himself was permitted to carry her from her bedroom to her drawing-room, and she was as a child in his arms. There he would place her gently upon her couch, and arrange her cushions twenty times in a day with all his extreme tenderness and care. The weakness and prostration were so great that she could only lie day after day perfectly still and passive, her hands idle. She had no power to hold the smallest volume. In subdued tones her husband read aloud to her as long as she could bear to listen; or

would sit down to the piano and very softly and quietly sing her favourite songs, trying to wean her thoughts into brighter grooves. This illness lasted altogether for nine months, when health and strength gradually returned, and the shadow was lifted from the home.

Amongst the many charms that distinguished her was a very rare one. She had little ear for music, could not sing a note; but in speaking her voice was music itself. Sweet, clear and distinct, it was like a silver chime in the house. Once heard, it was not easily forgotten; its beauty remained. To the writer it is as audible as when, seven years ago, in this world it was hushed for ever.

WITTINGTON.

CHAPTER VI

"And was the day of my delight
As pure and perfect as I say?
The very source and fount of Day
Is dash'd with wandering isles of night."

NEAR LANDRY.

WE have spoken of the French nurse who had so grieved for the loss of the little child. She was, in her way, a very remarkable woman, and so much a part of the family all the days of her life, that a few words about her will not be out of place.

Like every one else, she worshipped her mistress, but loved her own way still more. A more determined will never lived, happily guided by a fine intelligence. A

faithful, self-sacrificing, duty-fulfilling woman, neither time nor infirmities would have separated her from her beloved masters and charges; but departing once for a holiday to her native French village, when quite middle-aged, she was wooed and married before she had time to realise what she had done.

When asked a reason for her folly, all she could answer with tears was that she dreaded the time when old age would perhaps only make her an encumbrance to those she delighted to serve. Her married life was happy but short; she was soon left a widow. But dropped threads cannot always be taken up again, and she did not return to her former scenes. A neat cottage was found in her own village, picturesque with thatched roof and white-washed walls, reposing in a garden well stocked with flowers and fruit-trees, and comfortably furnished. Superannuated by those whom she had so faithfully served all her best days, and left in a moment of weakness, but for whom, nevertheless, she would have suffered martyrdom, she was installed—and was not unhappy. There she yet lives, the great lady of her surroundings.

Her charges had always been *her children*, and those yet living are so still. Since her marriage she has had many red-letter days, when she has paid them a month or two's visit in their own homes; but on more frequent occasions they have crossed the water to her village of Landry for the sake of spending a few hours with her: hours that would bring a whole year's sunshine and happiness to the faithful woman's heart and home.

Like the best of humankind, she had her faults, and one

of them was a jealous temper. Die for you, go through fire and water—that she would have done; but deprive her of her smallest claim upon your affections, and she could neither forget nor forgive. For this reason she never forgave herself for marrying when she considered herself old enough to have done with the frivolities of life. She would listen to neither rhyme nor reason where her heart or power was concerned. Sole mistress of her kingdom she would reign, and she ruled with the rod of a kindly despot.

In after years if one of her children, as Joachine always called them, was about to be married, so momentous an event could not be legal without her presence. That the Channel now divided them was only the more reason for a great effort. The crossing was almost death to her, but she was ready to brave even that. She would arrive with great ceremony, magnificent in long gold earrings—the pedigree of the French of her class—rustling in a new silk gown, made for the occasion and afterwards religiously reserved for village high days and holidays, the awe and worship of her friends and neighbours, who looked upon her as a being translated to a sphere above them. A woman who had travelled, had seen the wonders of the world, had gained a knowledge of life, a certain refinement, a degree of learning and *savoir faire*—all this exalted her to the dignity of a village oracle.

A great event on one of these visits was the occasion of her being photographed. The importance of the ceremony; the difficulty of getting the exact pose; the adjustment of the magnificent cap, and the due prominence of chain and earrings; her anxiety lest a fold of the incomparable gown

should be out of place—all had to be satisfactorily adjusted by the artist with the patience of a Job. When the result arrived in due time her surprise and delight were unbounded. She gave out a long series of disjointed exclamations, pausing to think and admire between each sentence, finally ending with: — "It is not so very surprising after all that my poor husband married me in middle age. I used sometimes to wonder whether my money had anything to do with it, but I really think it may have been only myself."

Perhaps it was a little of both. The husband, a superior man for his station, would launch out in small experiments which always failed. In this way he had wasted his substance; and in like manner Joachine's savings had melted before she became a widow.

The return to her village after one of these visits was the dark hour of her life, and many a secret tear must have been shed on the lonely journey. Yet at the end there was the homage of her little world awaiting her—a succession of village levées, in which the charm of reigning no doubt helped to heal the wounds of separation.

Then, as the years went on, another generation arose which knew her not, and the occasional visits to her had to be reinforced. In the first of these the infirmities of age and rheumatism were beginning to tell upon her; she walked with a stick. According to custom, she stood in her doorway awaiting the arrival, pale, agitated, and eager-looking: her brother, who lived with her, standing on one side, and a niece, who "kept house" for her, on the other. After due saluta-

tions, she sat down to recover her equanimity, and shed a few tears of regret for her lost kingdom.

The first emotion over, happiness reigned. Joachine, as ever, was always the pink of perfection and neatness. Not a hair unsmoothed, not a crease in the snow-white cap and ribbons, not a fold out of place in the gown; chain and earrings in all their glitter and glory. Ever the same good face—now pale and subdued, calm and placid with age, yet with something of youth remaining in spite of her eighty years; the same kindly blue eye, from which all the fire of other days had departed; the same dome-like forehead, with ample room for thought, an indication of the strength of character that once brooked no interference from equal or superior. Such she was; such she is still—a little *younger*-looking, perhaps, than she was ten years ago, but otherwise unchanged.

All her life she had had a great fear and horror of death, but it has recently gone from her; and in a letter lately received, for the first time she alludes to it voluntarily. "Is it possible," she remarks, "that I shall have the happiness of seeing you once more before I set out upon my last long journey?" —signs, one would think, of an approaching change, since coming events so often cast their shadows before.

The cottage found for her was like herself—perfection in its way, and in its manner of keeping. The door opened on to the living room: a quaint picturesque room, with sanded floor and a ladder staircase leading to the loft; the wooden ceiling supported by cross beams, and almost the whole of one side of the room given up to the huge chimney. Opposite the door

a wide latticed window looked out on the garden — flowers, vegetables, and fruit-trees: spreading branches that in season groan under the weight of pears, apples, and rich red plums. On one certain visit when all the fruit-trees were in blossom, Joachine sitting beneath them in her little avenue, the brilliant sunshine flecking the path with lights and shadows, formed a picture to which few artists could have done justice.

Peat, braise, and wood sent up a pleasant odour from the hearth, and would stir into a bright flame and a thousand sparks. On one side, within the chimney, was an arm-chair for Louis, the brother, in which, his day's quiet work done—tending his garden, feeding his pigs, and making himself generally useful—he smoked his pipe, caressed his dog, and meditated; for the whole family have been noted for their reflective intelligence. On the other side of the hearth a low chair for Joachine. Here she would often sit at night, when the others had long gone to rest, and brood over bygone days, her active and eventful life. Sometimes she would fall asleep and wake up in darkness, the night far spent, the fire out. As Malvina, her niece, once quaintly remarked, she might do it once too often, and awaken one morning paralysed with cold or burnt to a cinder. But Joachine had still a will of her own, and would not be turned.

There was a long table under the window, and when the lid was removed it disclosed a trough for bread-making. On baking days Malvina would show her good-will towards you by making delicious galettes, and presenting them hot and smoking from the oven, soaked in the freshest of country butter. To the right of this was the door leading to her larder,

given up to country fare, and seeing from January to December few delicacies. The autumn pig-killing was the great event as regards stock provision for the winter. In the way of meat it is what most of the villagers depend upon; and if the pig turns out badly it is a sad look-out for the Sundays, high days and holidays, of the cold months that have to be lived through.

To the left of the bread-trough is Joachine's bed-chamber and state apartment. Here she holds her receptions on such occasions as the present. The bed is almost invisible in an alcove, adorned with lace and other beautifying material. Here too she spreads her banquet for great events; the tables groan under a weight of good things provided by her grateful and hospitable heart, set off by snow-white linen and the best of English electro-plate. The walls are lined with portraits and framed photographs of all ages and sizes, and of more than one generation: those she has served and those she has helped to bring up. These she visits regularly, as other people do their picture galleries; and so holds mental communion with many who have now passed out of her everyday life, but who dwell in her faithful heart and memory for ever. The photographs begin to look faded and shadowy, and, alas! too many of those they represent have themselves passed into the land of shadows.

If the time were summer and not spring, her dessert-table would be adorned with magnificent peaches, plucked by *le cousin Pascal* from his own trees as a delicate attention—and nothing could be more delicately offered.

Pascal is a great man in his humble way: lives in a

house better, larger, more important than most in the village. His comely wife divides her attention between keeping it in order and looking after two fine children, their hope and happiness. His garden is full of choice flowers and fruit-trees; his peaches are ambrosia and invariably take the first prize at a neighbouring annual show. Pascal farms his own land and is his own master; and though he follows the plough and works as hard as any labourer, he might if he chose take life very easily. His broad forehead and large intelligent blue eyes show thought above his class. During the few years he went to school he carried everything before him.

"I don't know how I did it," he will tell you. "Certainly not by industry, for I was idle, and often only looked at my lessons on the way to school. If any mischief was going on, I was always at the bottom of it. Perhaps it is a pity I left school so soon. I think so now. But the mother wanted me at home: I was an only child, and she said she could not manage without me. On my part, I was glad enough to throw up books and live a free country life. So here I am, neither one thing nor the other, knowing just enough to wish I knew more—or less."

But Pascal is better than he thinks. He is well up in the questions of the day, and talks with sense and judgment. He is not a bad musician, and once sketched a plan of the roads and turnings of the village that would not have disgraced an engineer. When Joachine is disinclined for writing he is her secretary, and the result is an excellent letter, partly dictated, partly original, in which sometimes her domestic details are comically mixed up with his own sowing and reap-

ing interests, and the letter reads like a series of parentheses. He bought her house, in order that she should have no troublesome landlord to deal with; she makes him an excellent tenant, and he knows he is sure of his rent. Of a younger generation than herself, he gives her the attention of a son.

All this is disinterested goodness, for what little Joachine has saved out of her small income will go to her niece Malvina, who has devoted her later years to her aunt.

Perhaps we cannot give a better specimen of her still indomitable will than the following incident, which happened a few months ago.

Joachine, a martyr to rheumatism, had not left the boundary of her premises for many years. But in 1892 the brother Louis died, and before he passed away he exacted a promise that she would visit his grave. The cemetery is about a mile from her house. But to Joachine, who had not taken ten yards in as many years, a mile was an unknown quantity. She might as well have attempted to cross the Channel.

Still she had promised, and she would perform.

"You will wait until you can have the voiture of le cousin Pascal?" said Malvina, trembling with emotion.

"I will go on foot and in no other way," returned Joachine with all her wonted decision.

"You will never get there," cried Malvina, aghast. "You might as well try to walk to Carcassonne."

"With the help of your arm I shall do it," replied Joachine. "Let nothing more be said."

One morning she rose as usual. "This is the day," she

announced firmly—"I shall go to-day to the cemetery. Make no objection."

"Very well," said Malvina, in despair. "Make your toilette, and I will accompany you. But I shall take a chair with me for you to repose yourself on the road."

"No chair," cried Joachine. "If you think I am going to make myself a spectacle and a byword for the village, you are mistaken. I will have no chair."

"As you please," returned Malvina, courageous from desperation. "If the chair doesn't go, I don't go. That is as true as that I stand here."

And so at eleven o'clock the house was locked up and the trio started: Joachine, Malvina, and the chair. They had not gone forty yards before Joachine said, "I think I could take a few moments' repose." And Malvina triumphed—the chair was accepted.

So it went on. After infinite labour and time, and much laughter on the part of Malvina, in spite of her terror as to the consequences of the expedition, the cemetery was reached, and the grave duly visited. Joachine was happy: she had kept her word; and before leaving she pointed out where she herself desired to be laid when her time came. But the return journey! Malvina thought it would never end. Every few yards the chair had to be brought into requisition. Once or twice she had to go up to a neighbouring cottage and beg wine for her aunt—only too cheerfully bestowed upon the village oracle. And so they gradually made way. They had left home at eleven in the morning, they reached it again at eight at night: nine hours occupied in doing two

miles; the whole time spent upon the road, with the exception of one hour in the churchyard. Joachine was assisted to bed, where she remained for a week.

"But I kept my word," she quietly remarks. "I said I would go—and I went."

"And nearly lost your life in consequence," Malvina as quietly returns. "Was it worth the risk? We call it the great excursion of our life," she laughs, "a veritable journey; and it has since been the talk and wonder of the village. *Le voyage de Madame Joachine* — it sounds like the title of a book or a play."

Landry is the type and perfection of a French village. It is celebrated for its cleanliness, and its simple inhabitants pride themselves on that virtue above all others. In spring and summer a more charming picture cannot be seen than these spotless, white-washed cottages with their black casements, green shutters, and well-thatched roofs; reposing in gardens where the limes throw out their shadows and their perfume, and the trees are laden with blossom or fruit, each in its season.

Life is a haven of peace and repose. The village is well-to-do in its way. Some of the women work in the fields; others earn a living by cutting and trimming tulle for the manufacturers of a neighbouring town. The men beat out the flax; and at certain times of the year you may hear from the outhouse or barn of almost every cottage the swish-swish of the machine at its work. When the flax fails, it is hard times with them; the wolf howls at many a door.

The village extends over a wide area, and is of some importance. Away from the houses there are wide marshes where you may punt about and be completely hidden by the tall reeds that grow in great profusion and magnificence. The swish and rustle as you move along is a sound never to be forgotten. Many a peat-stack meets the eye, that presently will warm the cottage hearths and send its delicious odour through open doorways. As you stir the rushes, many a snipe springs up and takes its zigzag flight, but fears no gun from the simple villagers. The tone spread over the marshes on days when the skies are gray is deep and beautiful.

Landry owns a mayor, who keeps his office year after year, is lord of the neighbourhood, and has the largest farm for miles round: a magnificent house, which looks exactly like one of the cottages twenty times magnified, excepting that it has an imposing upper floor and a gray-tiled roof. It also has endless barns for cattle and hay, and an immense farmyard, kept as much in order as a garden. The buildings form three sides of a quadrangle, and the whole is enclosed in great green gates which seem encumbered with their own magnificence. The walls from beginning to end are white as driven snow: the mayor sets his people a good example. He is supposed to be fabulously rich, and when the villagers speak of him they change their tones as they do when talking of kings, or of their patron saint.

He and Pascal are good friends, though the mayor is much the greater man of the two, and would scorn to follow the plough or wear a blouse. But his intelligent neighbours

are few and far between, and, being a man who loves company, he cannot be too exclusive. Pascal makes an excellent companion. Once, years ago, he prophesied the fate of Europe; put chapter and verse together with strange accuracy; foretold troubles in Egypt, complications with Russia, humiliation to England. "Pascal, you are a wizard," we said, when all these things had come to pass. "You live here from one year's end to another, out of the world, with few to share your thoughts and opinions, and you know more of the fate of Europe than many of her statesmen."

"That is the very reason," replied Pascal, in his calm way, his great blue eyes, with so much width between them, full of dreamy intelligence. "I have no one to argue with, no opinions to hear on the other side; so I form my own views—such as they are—and keep to them. They are only founded upon a little common-sense. When I follow the plough or sow the seed, thoughts come into my head unbidden; I seem to see what people will do, how things will turn. I don't know chess, monsieur, and never saw it played; but I have heard that they who look on see more of the game than the players themselves."

Pascal is a philosopher out of place, intended for greater things; a village Hampden or mute inglorious Milton. Would he have been the happier in the higher state? Does he know anything of the "vague unsatisfied longings" which come to those who have missed their mark—or, not having missed it, have still found life a disappointment and delusion? Probably not. What he was years ago he is to-day, the embodiment of calm contentment.

The conclusion of such a visit to Joachine was the trying moment. Farewells were taken in the porch, and dimmed eyes followed the little procession down the long garden path to the outer gate. Looking back from the end of the lane, one saw in the middle of the deserted road a venerable figure, sad and solitary, leaning both hands upon her stick, her satellites watching from the porch. A turn to the left and all passed out of sight; and Joachine would go back to her chimney-corner to realise the happy dream and indulge for many a long day and night in the luxury of melancholy.

And Mrs. Henry Wood, never herself present on these occasions, would take special pleasure in hearing all the details and circumstances surrounding the life of her old and faithful servant. She still lives, but the grasshopper has become a burden and the silver cord is loosening.

JOACHINE'S COTTAGE.

CHAPTER VII

"And is it that the haze of grief
Makes former gladness loom so great?
The lowness of the present state,
That sets the past in this relief?"

IN THE DAUPHINÉ.

WHEN Ellen Wood left her early home for a foreign land not all her affection for her husband could prevent her from being very unhappy. She was still a young girl, and was suddenly transplanted amongst unfamiliar scenes and people, and heard a tongue she as yet only indifferently understood and spoke with difficulty. It is true that she very soon acquired fluency, but the first months had to be lived through, with all their strange surroundings.

She possessed a delightful home, and became acquainted with many charming people who did all in their power to make her happy, but whose society she could only in part enjoy whilst still unfamiliar with their language. Even the very Alpine mountains, which towered about her neighbourhood with their almost eternal snows, and which she soon grew to love, at first oppressed her with a feeling of estrangement. Their very vastness made them cold and unfriendly, like the distant sky, the far-off stars. She had never lived in a mountainous country, never seen anything higher than the Malvern Hills, which always filled her with such solitude and depression that to remain in Malvern had often been impossible to her.

The *mal du pays* which attacks the Savoyard, the yearning for his beloved mountains, was as yet a sealed book. The time arrived when she grew to understand and sympathise with it, but that was still in the future. There came a day when a little Savoyard wandering about England, with his dark skin, pathetic eyes, and little marmoset—an experience now of the past—filled her with strange compassion, and, had she possessed the magic carpet, he would quickly have been transported to his mountains and valleys, wild streams and placid lakes. For Savoie was one of Mrs. Henry Wood's favourite countries, and possessed some of her happiest memories.

Day after day, in that far-off unfamiliar scene, she would weep in secret for the home she had left behind; the father she tenderly loved, whose daily companion she had been; the intellectual life she had lived with him, which had become necessary as daily food; her beloved Cathedral, with

all its ties, social, ecclesiastical, and religious; the associations, romantic and real, within its precincts, from which she had never been separated; all the friends of her girlhood, the constant intercourse and companionship which so interested her. She had never realised how complete the wrench would prove, but it must in truth have been great and bitter; to such a nature as hers almost as the rending of life. A new life it was in every possible way, a changing of the old order. But time heals all wounds and reconciles us to most changes.

One of her great trials was that she could no longer attend divine service. In those far-off days—sixty years ago—things were not as they are now. Railways had not annihilated time and space and made the impossible easy. The world was still ringing with the unfortunate death of Huskisson, and prejudice had yet to be overcome. All reforms fight their way through transition, and in the process some one must suffer.

In France travelling was still a very slow affair, only possible to people of leisure. There were lumbering diligences for ordinary folk, but all who were able to do so posted. Mr. Henry Wood, then wealthy, generally posted in his own carriage with four horses, according to the custom of the time in mountainous countries, changing horses at the usual stations.

The young bride, on her way to the South, wrapped in furs and surrounded by foot-warmers, found every wish fulfilled almost before it was expressed. But it took many days to reach her new home, and little wonder if she felt that a world of time and distance divided her from the past.

They had halted at Lyons for the night, reaching the old town as the evening shadows were falling, but it was still light enough to see and appreciate its picturesque situation. Then, as now, the two broad rivers flowed side by side on their way to the sea; one turbid and troubled, the other clear and transparent, reflecting the blue sky above. To Mrs. Wood they seemed a type of two lives flowing to the ocean of eternity: the one dark and clouded, the other pure and steadfast. In rivers and seas she ever delighted.

They rose early the next morning and breakfasted; a hotel carriage was in waiting, and they were driven off to the heights of Fourvière, that famous hill outside the old town. The sun had risen; the sky was flushed with the splendours of morning. Mr. Wood handed his wife from the carriage, and led her to the brow of the hill when the view was suddenly disclosed.

In the first moment she almost thought she had left this world for another and a fairer, for she looked upon a vision of glory. It was a very clear day; small crimson and golden cloud-flakes reposed in the sky; there was not even a suspicion of mist upon the earth. Rising before her was the magnificent and matchless chain of the Alps, stretching far down into Italy, ending with Monte Rosa. They were still covered with snow, and the sun had changed its white, cold purity to the softest rose-colour. In the far distance they seemed to melt into the heavens. At their feet lay the old town, the pale smoke of early wood-fires curling above the roofs of the houses. Side by side the two rivers flowed on, gracefully winding in their courses,

passing onward through matchless scenery, little known in those days, but now world-famed.

No wonder that Mrs. Wood gazed with silent amazement. It was a revelation, this wonderful panorama of snow-covered, sun-flushed mountains; a new world, altogether beyond anything she had ever imagined. It is certain that earth possesses no more marvellous view than this from Mont Perrache on a clear day. The scene stirred within her everything that was deep and earnest, her most religious impressions, all her extreme love of the beautiful and the sublime. For one of the few times in her life she was moved to tears in presence of another, but many causes may have given rise to the moment's emotion. The scene suddenly opened up was in every sense a new world to her. Then she had undergone many days' travelling—fatiguing under all circumstances. They had also had a tiring week in Paris: a round of gaieties, introduction to many friends, balls and dinner-parties. It is also possible that she was beginning to realise how completely her old life had passed away, and a new life amongst strange scenes was to be hers. But she quickly recovered her composure, and presently they turned away from this earthly paradise.

The whole of that morning was spent in Lyons, and as they walked through some of the smaller streets the whir of the looms and the sound of the weaver's shuttle issuing from doors and windows delighted Mrs. Wood. Ever interested in humanity, she could not tire of watching the weavers bending over their looms, many of them pale, consumptive-looking, almost refined, whilst her husband exchanged pleasant

remarks with them. A very different type of workman from the English—a people more interesting and more picturesque; everything about them clean and orderly; their homes bright and pleasant, with the advantage of light though relaxing air, and brilliant sunshine.

For the first time she made acquaintance with the silk factories of Lyons, visiting and inspecting one or two of the most important: sights and sounds and industries that must vividly have recalled her old home; though the silk factories of Lyons were so essentially different from the glove factories of Worcester. It was a visit ever afterwards remembered. Who, indeed, could forget the first vision of that glorious Alpine chain, stretching like an enchanted dream far down to the sunny skies of Italy?

Her next view of the majestic mountains, under whose shadow she was now to live, was again an early morning at sunrise. It was their last day's journey, and as they neared the end her husband, either for business reasons or that he was growing impatient to introduce his wife to her new home, hurried onwards. Contrary to their usual custom, they had posted all night; the cushions of the carriage so arranged by a clever contrivance that the delicate young wife was able to recline in comfort, thus avoiding a fatigue she could scarcely have gone through.

As dawn broke and the sun rose, Mrs. Wood for the second time looked upon a magic world, and was filled with wonder. But the scene was no longer that unbroken chain which can only be viewed from such a height as Fourvière. Now the mountains towered about her, raising

their lofty snow-crowned heads towards the clear blue skies of that southern clime, singularly clear and blue even in the early dawn and cold of winter.

The travellers were surrounded by everything in nature that was grand and gigantic. Their road fringed the very borders of the mountains, now opening out into smiling valleys, now passing into frowning defiles unspeakably magnificent. Small châlets here and there dotted the mountain sides, and fir-trees grew upon many a slope and scented the cold air with their perfume; but signs of life and habitation were few and far between. The wonderful Alps reposing in solitude seemed wrapped in impenetrable silence and mystery. Occasionally a small village would break the monotony: such picturesque villages as were then found crossing the highways of the country. With interest and anxious curiosity Mrs. Wood looked upon this new world, wondering what were the people, their ways, thoughts, customs, amongst whom she was now to live.

These village intervals attracted her more than all else; for, much as she loved the beautiful in nature, mind and sympathies were ever most with men and women. People, not places, were her study and delight; and the villages were so many signs and tokens of human life, where many a simple tragedy was played out, and many a rustic romance, if they could only be known.

The towering snow-capped mountains were flushed with the early sunlight. To our traveller the scene was almost overpowering; mile after mile a succession of surprises, the road now closing in as though forbidding farther progress,

and now, by a hidden turn in the pass, opening out into valleys that in their season are warm and lovely and smiling, yielding all the beauties of nature and all the fruits of the earth.

"Is the silence always eternal, always unbroken?" she asked, somewhat anxiously; for all through life the silence and solitude so often found in nature oppressed her with a weight of sadness scarcely to be endured.

As a younger girl, when the family moved into the country for the summer, it occasionally happened that she had to be sent home again. The days would pass, and the loneliness, the weird mystery and solemnity of the trees, to which every one is not susceptible, the absence of life and movement, would so affect her that night after night sleep was banished, and to remain was impossible. She would return home with her governess; and then it was sure to happen that the father, who could never bear to be long separated from his favourite child, would ere many days return also.

These were her happiest times; when every one was away, and she had her father's undivided care, his quiet, earnest conversation, with which she, of all, was most in touch and sympathy. They would spend hours in each other's society; charmed hours; playing chess, reading and discussing their favourite authors, sketching together. Or her father would take up his flute, on which he discoursed sweet music, and delight her with quiet airs and melodies, of which she never tired. Soft music, old ballads and melodies, she loved, but nothing loud, such as an orchestra; and for classical music it must be confessed she never cared. The artistic temperament she possessed, but not in music. She was extremely

fond of the old English ballads; of the Scotch and Irish songs, such as "Robin Adair" and "Oft in the Stilly Night," and would listen to them year after year with true pleasure. In later years almost her favourite song was the quiet "Bridge," set to music by Miss Lindsay. The simple melody and pathetic words appealed to her, and evening after evening she would ask one of her children to sing it, and would never grow weary; if it happened to be sung when she was not in the room, before many bars were over she was almost certain to glide in and take her accustomed seat. The son in question possessed a gift for extemporising; thoughts would flow in music brilliant or sad according to the moment, but always soft and quiet. To this also she would listen for ever. "That to me is real music," she would say; but from anything loud she always retreated. Those were indeed to all about her most emphatically *les beaux jours de la vie;* ended, alas, for ever. All but two of her children have followed her to the Silent Land; and the happy days and years, the delightful evenings that she filled with a nameless charm, are records of the past.

"Is the silence always eternal, always unbroken?" she asked, as she gazed upon the wonderful Alpine chain. "Shall we be always surrounded by such solitude?"

Her husband smiled. "In the mountains," he replied, "I fear there is always more or less unbroken silence and solitude. But your home lies in a town, where you will find friends whose pleasure it will be to welcome you and make you miss as little as possible the home you have left. Many are charming, refined and cultivated."

"The French are more quickly known than the English," she remarked.

"They are," he returned. "Their temperament is more sunny, and quite as constant. You will soon have occupation and amusement in abundance—occupation from early morning, when, if it pleases you to accompany your housekeeper to market, you may improve your French by talking to all the old market-women, and listening to their histories."

"How do you endure the summer in this southern climate?" asked Mrs. Wood, always affected by intense heat with a feeling of approaching calamity. She could never shake it off, and was incapable of the least exertion.

"You know that for the summer months we have our home in the hills," he replied. "There you will have sheltered gardens to wander in at pleasure; all the beauties of nature to charm you. It is an earthly paradise. You must fill the house with friends, who in turn will like to have you at their own homes when you care to change the scene. Night and day thousands of nightingales will pour out an unceasing flood of song; the groves echo and re-echo with them."

"And when the song leaves the bird," said Mrs. Wood, "what then?"

"Then music and melody must be within doors," laughed her husband. "Our home must be the abode of harmony."

Of harmony it ever was. The voice of anger or argument was never heard. With a nature self-contained, deeply religious, ever conscious of personal influence and responsibility, it would have been impossible. And melody her husband could always supply when other sources failed.

Both for speaking and singing he had a sweet and refined voice.

He in no way exaggerated the beauties and attractions either of their summer or winter home, towards the latter of which they were now travelling. It was reached about five o'clock in the afternoon, when twilight was already beginning to fall and clothe everything in its sense of mystery.

Then began for Mrs. Henry Wood the new life in the new home. Its first impression ought to have charmed her, and probably did so. No pains had been spared in arranging her surroundings. The house was large and spacious; not a mere "appartement," as is so often the case in France, even with the wealthy. A large hall adorned with palms and evergreens and a wide old-fashioned staircase led up to the salons decorated with furniture of a bygone period. Exquisite flowers perfumed the rooms, and these alone must have delighted Mrs. Wood. Quaint old china stood upon the consoles and chimney-pieces, and empire clocks—less rare in those days—struck the hours on silver chimes. The artistic furniture was covered in rich amber velvet and satin. Curtains of the same colour and material draped the windows.

As good fortune would have it, from some of these windows the view was magnificent. Towering mountains with their snow-capped peaks raised their heads towards the heavens, blue and brilliant as only the skies of the South can be. Within view flowed a stately and beautiful river, here and there spanned by an ancient picturesque bridge. Surrounding them were other habitations, and in the streets all sights and sounds of

life in which Mrs. Wood ever delighted: an interest which never grew less. Her heart-beats kept time and tune to the joys and sorrows of humanity as keenly when youth had passed and the time of sentiment and romance was no more as in the earlier years.

Youth is often impulsive and quixotic, but the steady purpose of later years proves character; and it is this wisdom of age which makes enduring to the end so difficult. With Mrs. Henry Wood heart and sympathies were never dulled, and youth itself refused to forsake her. The portrait which forms the frontispiece to this Memoir was taken when she was nearly seventy, but the artist declared that he could find no sign or trace of age wherewith to indicate the passing of time. Nevertheless, it is a likeness only; the colouring and expression, the life and charm of the face, could not be rendered.

LANDRY.

CHAPTER VIII

"I know that this was Life,—the track
Whereon with equal feet we fared;
And then, as now, the day prepared
The daily burden for the back."

IN THE DAUPHINÉ.

DAYS passed into weeks and months and Mrs. Henry Wood grew familiar with her beautiful surroundings and became happy.

There was a great deal in her new life that could not fail to appeal to her nature. She was devoted to her husband, and his happiness seemed bound up in her. Many acquaintances became her true friends for life, as in the case of Madame de Marseine—with whom we shall presently

have to do—ever her earnest and affectionate admirer until she followed her sister, Madame de St. Ange, into the land beyond the veil.

Other friends there were who did all in their power to make her life amongst them as a long and happy dream. Apparently her sojourn might continue there until old age; it seemed improbable, almost impossible, that any change could take place; there was no reason for supposing that it need ever come to an end—that the charming homes would one day pass into other hands and echo with less musical voices. It ought never to have ended, and though in a few years all was to pass away, as yet no shadow had fallen before the coming events. They were still in the future.

Friends rallied round her in those early days, and she could only be sensible of their great kindness—such kindness and charm as only the French can show—and respond to it. In a very few months her quick ear and intelligence had conquered the language, and though she never spoke it with the purity of her husband's accent, she conversed with almost equal fluency. Thus she was soon able to play the part of sympathetic hostess to perfection, and enter into all the sparkling vivacity of her French acquaintances.

This facility in speaking greatly added to her happiness. She no longer felt as an alien in a foreign land, and grew in touch with her surroundings. As France had become the country of her adoption, she endeavoured to give it a large portion of her heart. And she succeeded. It was her home. Here children were born to her, and the heart of the young wife and mother entwined itself in the shrine of domestic ties

THE BANKS OF THE ISÈRE, DAUPHINÉ.

and affection—scenes, to a truly good woman, ever sanctified by the holiest and most sacred thoughts and feelings.

Her life, her occupation, her interests were here. As yet she had not begun to write, excepting in secret and on rare occasions, and for many a long year to come she was not to publish anything to the world; but she was ever conscious of a power possessed by few, and dreamed of fame.

She had quickly identified herself with the interests of the humbler classes around her, giving sympathy and help where they were needed; finding a ready welcome everywhere; charming by the brightness of her presence and her gentle animation. The going to market her husband had alluded to in that first journey became one of her pleasures. She was enchanted with the picturesqueness of the scene; the neatness of the comely farmers' wives and daughters; the manner in which they arranged their wares, more especially the wonderful vegetable stalls—an art peculiar to the South; the sweet scents and colours of the flower-market; and the sparkling air and sunshine which threw a magic over all.

Often she would accompany her housekeeper, another servant following with a large basket for purchases. At first she thought the housekeeper stern in bargaining with the market-women, but soon found the custom universal and necessary. Now and then she would gently remonstrate if she thought things were going too far, and the housekeeper, respectful but uncompromising, had ever the same reply: "Je suis la femme de charge de Madame,—il faut faire son devoir."

But the day came when Mrs. Wood could talk easily to the market-women, and then great was her influence. There was nothing they would not do for her, and their best was put out of sight until they saw her approaching, when it was triumphantly brought forth with many a significant shake of the head, as if a perfect understanding existed between *la belle dame* and her devoted *marchande*.

Sometimes she would quietly summon a servant and depart alone, the housekeeper only discovering treachery when too late. Then she hastened off with as much righteous anger as she dared; perhaps to find Madame on the threshold of the market, returning homeward, amused at the housekeeper's concerned expression as she beheld the basket of trophies. "Madame would certainly ruin everything; those things had been paid for twice over, without doubt. She must really appeal to Monsieur to exercise his influence with Madame." Fatal argument; for, if Madame had paid in gold for her marketings where she ought to have given silver, Monsieur would have declared that his wife, like the king, could do no wrong.

Mrs. Wood's name was a universal stumbling-block amongst the tradespeople and market-women of the town. The *W* was impossible and could not be conquered, and the name consequently underwent strange transformations. The most common was *Oude;* and to "Madame Oude" she frequently responded. With others of more imagination it was often distorted into *Houdst;* and even *Loutre* became one of her new names. The latter was coined with a sort of unconscious revenge by an old market-woman who kept a fruit stall and invariably

had the best in the market. She was also the largest woman in the market, and certainly the ugliest, with an eye which had a habit of looking round the corner, whilst the other remained true to the centre. This gave her an inconceivably comical appearance, and it was impossible to look at her with the gravity due to the gentler sex.

In consequence of her unusual size, Mr. Wood had given her the name of *Old Venus;* and as Old Venus she soon became universally known. Sometimes a French dame, in absence of mind, would address her as Madame Venus, much to the old woman's indignation and protest. But continual dropping will wear away a stone, and the time came when she accepted the name with a good grace. "Old Venus!" she would cry, shaking her fat sides with laughter: "Old Venus! It must be on account of my size—it can't be for my beauty. That name comes from Monsieur Loutre, I know; no one like Monsieur Loutre pour les petites plaisanteries. C'est lui qui nous fait la pluie et le beau temps!"

Old Venus was one of Mrs. Henry Wood's devoted slaves, and no sooner saw her approaching than she would descend from her perch, her truly ugly countenance beaming with pleasure, sunning over with smiles. Poor Venus recognised goodness and beauty, and, though the one had been denied her, there beat many a less worthy heart in the world than hers. "Bon jour, Madame Loutre," she would exclaim, her voice gruff and deep, but unmistakably sincere. "Vous êtes un rayon du soleil au marché"—a poetical compliment, though roughly spoken. "See what I have put aside, hoping

Madame would pay us a visit this fine morning." Then from some invisible recess out would come baskets of exquisite fruit, which had to be purchased in return for so much devotion.

The day came when Mrs. Wood bade farewell to these beloved scenes and they knew her no more. Sincere and universal was their mourning and lamentation for her departure, and long she dwelt in the hearts of all. Many of her friends she met again in after days, but these faithful and humble women never. Long years ago Old Venus departed this life; and on her death-bed, some years after Mrs. Wood had passed out of her sight, she said to a lady who had come to visit her in her sickness, and was acquainted with Mrs. Wood: "Ah! if my chère Madame Loutre were only in the town and could come to see me, I think I should die happy. She was the most beautiful and the best lady that ever came amongst us."

"I will tell her what you say when I next write to her," remarked the visitor.

"Ne manquez pas," returned the old woman fervently. "Tell her Old Venus is no more, and that one of her last thoughts was of her chère dame, and one of her last wishes for a look at her lovely face."

But there were other phases of the life of those days, when spring was well advanced and birds were singing. The charming face would be no more seen in the streets, and Old Venus knew it was useless to put away her best: cette bonne Madame Loutre was à la campagne. The scene changed to the mountains and one of those old-fashioned châteaux, with high slate roofs and endless rooms opening

into each other, in which France delights. The grounds were beautifully laid out and surrounded by lovely groves, where in the hottest summer days it was ever cool and shady and life was full of charm. Whispering pine-trees stood out vividly against the blue sky, and the air was always clear and exhilarating; terraces and grounds were adorned with statues; and the distant views were marvellous.

They looked down upon a valley whence opened out a wide-spreading plain, in the midst of which, like a silver thread, ran the far-famed river. The gleam of the sun was often reflected upon its waters, and now and then small craft would be seen passing to and fro. In the early morning all nature far and near would frequently be clothed in a purple haze. The colours of sunrise and sunset were often gorgeous and flaming, and in these, more than anything else, Mrs. Wood delighted. The mountain summits would catch the glow of departing day, and everything would change to rose-colour or deeper red, dying out in the growing twilight.

Here and there in the wide plain a distant village reposed, its cluster of small châlets the only signs of human life and habitation. Morning and evening the blue peat smoke might be seen ascending in picturesque forms, and, if you chanced to pass that way, the air was full of homely, delicious scent. As night closed in, lights gleamed from the little windows and open doorways, like distant stars; but they soon disappeared, and the village became steeped in silence and slumber. The villagers, rising at four or five in the morning, went to bed at sundown. Darkness would fall quickly in the valley where the mountains shut out the twilight.

And the nightingales sang for ever, and filled the groves with melody. Day and night they never ceased. Myriads of birds, apparently intoxicated with their own exquisite sounds, they never seemed to sleep; week after week the song went on, ever the same. It never grew wearisome or monotonous; there was no desire for cessation. The sound soothed and charmed by day, and at night was a delicious lullaby which courted, never banished slumber. Sometimes it would visit the dreams and bring visions of Paradise—and for an earthly Paradise nothing could exceed this wonderful spot. Ever and ever the song of the nightingales echoed far up the heights, far down the valley, filling the air with music and the heart with rapture.

LYONS.

CHAPTER IX

"And many an old philosophy
On Argive heights divinely sang,
And round us all the thicket rang
To many a flute of Arcady."

ABBEVILLE.

IN these days the château would often be filled with guests, and groves and terraces would be bright with laughter and conversation: living forms still more beautiful than the sculptured images which never moved or changed and brought no sense of companionship.

It was here that Mrs. Henry Wood first met Madame de Marseine, and the two ladies quickly became firm and lifelong friends. The

Comte de Marseine owned a château in the neighbourhood, some miles distant. Their home was in Paris, but here for the summer months they almost invariably came year after year. The family had suffered much in days gone by, and though still wealthy, had lost much in the political changes which from time to time agitated the country. The grandfather of the Count who reigned in Mrs. Wood's time had lost his life on the scaffold in the Revolution of '93, and but for the beautiful and brave Charlotte Corday, who helped to bring the frightful events of those days to a close, it might have gone more seriously for the De Marseines.

"My husband's grandmother saw Charlotte mount the scaffold," said Madame de Marseine one day to Mrs. Henry Wood, when they were talking of Robespierre and the Revolution. "She felt a profound compassion for this brave young woman who had heroically sacrificed her life for her country; and, whatever may be thought of her act, she was at least a martyr to her belief. In vain the grandmother's friends declared, 'Your only safety is in keeping quietly out of sight.' 'I care not,' was the answer. 'They have taken my husband, and I have nothing to live for. But I must see Charlotte Corday mount the scaffold. Some of her people were my friends; her uncle was my sister's confessor; I feel as though the knowledge that I am near will be a consolation. You may find me a window if you like; even close the shutters if I can see through them; but she must know that I am there. Her confessor is acquainted with me. Let him come that I may send her a message; he is to be trusted. That fiend Marat is dead—there will not be many more victims.' So

it happened. The window was secured, and the fact was secretly intimated to Charlotte Corday through the confessor, who himself abhorred the Revolution and all its myrmidons. In return she sent my grandmother a message of love and thanks, assuring her that she was happy and had no desire to live. Her task was performed, in which she considered she had been helped by that Heaven to which she was hastening."

"A true heroine," said Mrs. Henry Wood. "And though the deed was terrible, the motive was exalted. I cannot wonder at old Madame de Marseine's admiration for her. Nothing else was possible."

"Charlotte Corday was indeed a true heroine," returned Madame de Marseine. "Well, the eventful morning did not tarry. My grandmother had spent much of the night in prayer, hoping that by some miracle the morning might bring a change—life and escape for her dear victim. It was not to be. The hour struck; the sound of the tumbril was heard; the fatal procession approached; the mob surged to and fro like a living tide, many of the multitude no better than demons, others peaceable citizens who could do nothing. Charlotte mounted the scaffold with a serene expression which told of Divine support and undiminished bravery. She looked a beautiful saint as she quietly moved towards the dread machine. It is said that Monsieur de Paris trembled as his gaze fell upon her, and many thought his courage was about to fail. It has also been said that, perceiving it, she whispered to him, 'Courage, mon ami; je vous pardonne, comme je pardonne mes ennemis. Faites votre devoir.' How far that may be true

I know not; I believe it, for we had it from the confessor, who, however, did not attend her to the scaffold; but I know no history that records it. Others have no doubt said the same. Then turning, for a moment, to a certain window with closed shutters, behind which she knew my grandmother was gazing with all her heart in her eyes and all her tears dried at their source, Charlotte, raising her arm with a gesture worthy of a queen, pointed solemnly towards Heaven, as if to intimate that there was her home, and there one day they would meet again. A few moments and all was over; and the crowd waited, wondering if another victim was coming and who it would be."

"And old Madame de Marseine?"

"She came to no harm. It was not her fate to die by the guillotine. The Revolution was nearly over; peace once more fell for a time upon France. When it did so, my grandmother's courage gave way. She was aged, and the strain had been too great. When all danger had passed, the nerves relaxed and she quietly faded into the tomb. I never can think of that time—that so-called Age of Reason, when Mdlle. Aubry was elevated in Notre Dame—or St. Roch, which was it?—as its goddess, without shuddering."

"It is a sad story," said Mrs. Wood. "The two great heroines of France have always deeply interested me—Jeanne d'Arc and Charlotte Corday; but in the heroism of Jeanne there was a good deal of exaltation, whilst with Charlotte Corday it was the opposite. Of gentle birth, accustomed to self-control, no outward influence upheld her. The one was supported by martial music and waving flags and an admiring multitude; the other was alone, and all her sur-

roundings were depressing. That solitary walk to Paris would have been sufficient to quench the ardour of a less brave spirit."

"More than enough," returned Madame de Marseine; "and if my grandmother were here she would go further than either of us. She would have her canonised, and placed in the front rank of saints. Jeanne d'Arc can never be canonised. The Church consented to her death, and can never canonise one whose martyrdom it helped to bring about.[1] But Charlotte owed nothing to the Church, one way or the other; she was, indeed, murdered by the enemies of the Church, and so far may be said to have assisted its cause."

"Then why does not the Church in gratitude canonise her?" asked Mrs. Wood.

"Ah, my dear, we do not always receive gratitude from those in high places. Confer a benefit upon exalted personages, and they too often consider that a favour has been conferred upon you. Put not your trust in princes—you see I know something of your beautiful Bible. It is always a case of wheels within wheels, too. France is republican and revolutionary at heart, and at any time monarchy may be a thing of the past. The Church knows this and is wise in her generation. But the character of Charlotte Corday has never been appreciated. It will require the influence of time and history to place her in her proper niche. We are still too near the glamour of those days to weigh them calmly; even now people cannot judge dispassionately of the Reign of

[1] Recent events seem to contradict Madame de Marseine's assertion; but much is done now that seemed impossible sixty years ago.

Terror. In fifty years' time, perhaps, they will begin to see Charlotte Corday in her true light—one of the best and bravest women the world has known."

Was Madame de Marseine a prophet? More than half a century has passed away since those words were spoken: has the world awakened to the merit of Charlotte Corday?

"A very sad story," repeated Mrs. Wood, "which for ever throws a shadow even over the terrible drama of the Revolution. My heart has always ached for Charlotte Corday."

"My dear," returned Madame de Marseine, "let it ache no longer. I am many years older than you—old enough to be your mother, though still a young woman; but I have lived long enough to learn that life is full of sadness: a life cut short is not always to be deplored; and such a history as Charlotte Corday's is not the most unhappy. I should not have said that twenty years ago, but I say so now, and am certain of it. Charlotte met her fate bravely—nothing less was possible to so heroic a nature. If she could come to us, she would perhaps tell us that her martyrdom was her grandest and happiest moment. I think I see her turning to that terrible masked figure, whose nerve seemed to give way when hers triumphed, and I hear the sweet tones of her voice bidding him do his duty. Poems have been written, operas composed, plays acted upon Jeanne d'Arc, but Charlotte Corday is remembered only by the few who see her for what she really was."

Many such conversations confirmed the friendship between Mrs. Henry Wood and Madame de Marseine. The Countess, in those days, was a woman of some forty years, tall, dignified, and commanding—far younger than most Frenchwomen of

that age; spiritually and intellectually superior to most of her contemporaries. She belonged to an old Breton family, and possessed all the best points of her race. She moved in the great world of Paris, and was an especial favourite with Louis Philippe and Marie Thérèse, the King always declaring that she bore some resemblance to the latter, though in reality much better-looking. Every one worth knowing she knew, both in the political and social world and the world of letters. But she little guessed that the child-like friend at her side would also one day become famous, though nearly thirty years were first to roll away.

Yet something of the truth seemed to dawn upon her, for one day, looking steadfastly at Mrs. Wood, she remarked, almost in the words of poor André Chénier, himself a victim to Revolution, and touching her forehead with her finger:

"My dear, I think there is something there; something in that head and behind those eyes which is asking to come out. I believe you will one day be a writer, but it will not be a political writer. One has only to look at you to see that you are all romance and imagination. When that day comes, I trust I may still be here."

Mrs. Henry Wood laughed. Even then, we have said, she was conscious of a strange power, but never spoke of it, even to her most intimate friend. On this occasion she only replied: "Politics are certainly not in my line. And for anything else—as far as I can see, my life will be spent amidst the Alps and amongst the French—out of touch with all English influences. What you think is not likely to happen."

"One never knows," returned Madame de Marseine. "Life

is full of surprises. And you are little more than a child, and can bide your time." But the prophecy was long fulfilling.

"Should you like always to remain here?" asked Madame de Marseine.

"I am learning to be very happy," was the somewhat wistful reply. "I should be ungrateful were it otherwise. Every one is good to me, and I am surrounded by all that heart can wish for."

"And you have so charming a husband! Even I, old woman as I am, am fascinated by him. But, my dear, he has not your strength of character. Il faudra le ménager. You are young for diplomacy, but tact is born with us, and for one of your age you possess it largely."

Mrs. Henry Wood's face saddened for a moment. Her friend had given expression to what she had already discovered: that her husband, delightful in private life, was too amiable to be a true, strong man of the world. He would be led rather than become a leader. And with her keen insight into human nature she saw in such a temperament the possibilities of future danger. But she made no reply. Madame de Marseine, already firmly devoted to her, a woman of the world and of experience, spoke from a loyal motive: Mrs. Wood, equally loyal to herself, her husband, and her friend, was silent.

They met frequently. Of all friends Madame de Marseine was the one preferred, and they were much together, visiting for a few days at a time at each other's houses. The Château de Marseine was French in every particular, from the interior appointments to the regulation of the household. In Mrs.

Henry Wood's home many English ways and evidences had been introduced, and the result was greater comfort—a more picturesque effect than the stiff and conventional French arrangement could produce.

Madame de Marseine always declared that her happiest days were spent in the less pretentious but more beautiful home of Mrs. Henry Wood. The view also from the terraces was much finer. The two friends would sit for hours together enraptured by the lovely scene, which day by day only seemed to grow dearer and more charming. No amount of time and gazing could take from the majesty of those mountains; from the soothing murmur of the pine forests as the breeze stirred their pointed tops and shed abroad their perfume; from the repose of the far-reaching valley and occasional villages; from the magnificent river gleaming like a silver thread in graceful windings and taking its quiet course towards the blue waters of the Mediterranean.

And when the sun was high and the heat of summer was full upon them, they would seek the shelter of the pine groves and listen to the ceaseless melody of the nightingales' song: all the more prized in that, with the days of June, the song would end and silence fall upon wood and grove.

But whilst it lasted, the friends were never tired of listening, never weary of conversing to such an accompaniment. Both had exceptional minds, and sweet and charming must have been the hours that ran in golden sands. No wonder that in after years they formed one of Mrs. Henry Wood's happiest recollections.

Her dress in those days was almost invariably some flowing

white and airy material, for it has been said that at all times she felt the heat intensely. She must have seemed very fragile and fairy-like as she sat amongst her flowers; or in the shady groves, where seats were cunningly disposed; or reclining in her drawing-room, where, in days when they were alone, she listened to her husband's voice at the piano, whilst thoughts and dreams passed through her imagination.

The nights too were beautiful; and as long as the nightingales sang, as full of melody. As the sun set across the valley, darkness would fall, a sense of mystery haunted the Alpine slopes and valleys. Black and sombre and weird looked the trees on the mountain sides, no sound breaking the utter stillness excepting the occasional hooting of an owl or the deep baying of a far-off St. Bernard.

On moonlight nights the effect was almost ghostly. The mountains cast deep shadows across the valley. Out of one wood into another the owls would take their silent flight with melancholy cry. As the moon rose the shadows would disappear for a time, and the world reposed in a flood of pale light, of which the far-off river would here and there catch gleams and flashes. The warm night air suggested quiet thought, a delicious repose. Lights gleamed from the house, and threw their reflection upon the terraces. When there was no moon, the stars shone with a size and brilliancy unknown to the skies of England. Nothing could be more lovely, more solemn and mysterious, than these Alpine summer nights, where all was calm and beautiful and full of peace.

Nevertheless, the twilight hour, the "gathering into night," was always trying to Mrs. Wood. There would still sometimes

fall upon her a sense of loneliness that was almost insupportable, as it had come to her upon the Malvern Hills in childhood. Everything seemed haunted by a strange silent spirit of invisible life and movement. To the last, she was happier in the centre of a stirring town with all its animated sights and sounds. Once when visiting friends in a small country place, it chanced to be the period of the annual fair. In a field not very far off booths were erected, and until very late at night torches flared, a crowd surged to and fro, drums and trumpets made the air anything but musical. "We fear you were much disturbed last night by that dreadful fair," sympathetically remarked her hosts the next morning. "Not at all," was the reply, "I quite delighted in the sounds, and in picturing the enjoyment of the people. I slept admirably." On the other hand, when near the sea, no matter how desolate the spot, she ever felt a sense of happiness and companionship. If absolutely alone, she was never lonely. She once remarked that if she could choose her abode and arrange things to her fancy, it should be Piccadilly, with all its life and movement on the one side and the sea flowing on the other.

We dwell upon this period of Mrs. Henry Wood's life abroad not only because it was specially beloved by her—in which she made many true friends, and of which in after years she was never tired of conversing with the writer—but also because it was a period that greatly influenced the already singularly-formed mind. She was so young that her surroundings could not be without their distinct and permanent effect. Happy, then, that they were of so exceptional a nature, disposing her to thought and reflection, to be utilised when the pen was taken

seriously in hand. Everything about her conduced to high and lofty aspirations, of which youth is essentially the period. Her religious temperament was being confirmed in all that unwavering faith which ever afterwards stood her in good stead, and enabled her to go through many troubles with a heroism and a reliance in the Divine guidance seldom equalled. In the darkest hours of life she was absolutely calm and serene—entirely trustful. "It is God's will; He doeth all things well." She rarely said these things, but she never ceased to act up to them. Amidst all the beauties of nature, the mountains, the clear heavens and the silent stars, she gathered strength; and many a meditation in those lovely groves remained to bear good fruit in the time to come.

ALPINE VILLAGE, DAUPHINÉ.

CHAPTER X

" Thrice blest whose lives are faithful prayers,
Whose loves in higher love endure ;
What souls possess themselves so pure,
Or is there blessedness like theirs ? "

In Savoie.

But the scene changed sometimes.

They would leave home for occasional visits into neighbouring lands: more often than not Savoie or Switzerland. Mrs. Henry Wood specially delighted in the mountains, valleys, and lakes of the smaller country; and all the charming scenes around Chambéry were explored. The place itself, with its quaint arcades and ancient fountains, knew her well. Amongst

and the rare beauties of the country might sink into heart and memory.

The scenery was often wild in the extreme. Wonderful mountains towered on all sides, and many a pass tried the mettle of the horses. Often the river rushed past them, frothing and foaming over its rocky bed. Smiling valleys opened out, with picturesque farmhouses and cultivated fields, in which the peasants worked from sunrise to sunset, with no interests beyond; to whom the outer world was as distant as the stars, as unknown and mysterious. They tended their cattle and sought their goats and cows on the mountain side, and towards evening many a *ranz des vaches* rose musically upon the air. The greatest change to-day is in the people themselves—their occupations are much the same; mountains, valleys and rivers have not altered; but even in these remote districts the country folk have become less primitive, more awake to their own interests. The outer world is no longer a sealed mystery, far off as the stars.

One day Mr. and Mrs. Wood were walking on the road to Mouxy in one of their numerous excursions near Aix-les-Bains, when they lighted upon a group of reapers resting for a moment from their labour. They looked simple, picturesque and interesting, more or less young, five or six in all. The women wore bodices and short petticoats, very much like the costumes of the sister country, their feet, encased in small wooden sabots, displaying neat, well-turned ankles. The men wore breeches, with broad belts at their waists, and having thrown jackets aside were in shirt sleeves.

The group looked so shyly and wistfully at our travellers

HAUTE COMBE, LAC DU BOURGET.

that, even had it not been their custom to stop and exchange sentences with many who crossed their path, they must have done so on this occasion. They were not only an interesting, but a handsome group, who had just taken their midday meal on the roadside bank, beyond which lay the rich, ripe cornfields, and were making the most of their short leisure. As the travellers paused, they rose, and the men doffed their broad-brimmed hats, baring dark curly heads, with a "Bon jour, monsieur et dame," in the dialect of the neighbourhood.

The greeting was duly returned. "It is your leisure hour?" added Mrs. Wood. "You have been taking your dinner, and are now resting?"

"Yes," they replied. "They had eaten their soup, and were allowed half an hour's repose after it. It wasn't too much for those who rose at four in the morning, and began work at sunrise."

"You must often be more than tired before night comes," was the rejoinder.

"We are used to it," returned the spokeswoman of the party—a tall, handsome *Savoyarde*, with a sunburnt face and dark eyes. "Work does not tire us; we rise early, but we go to bed early—often before the sun goes down. And we have all Sunday for reposing. We never work on Sunday."

"You are married," said Mrs. Wood, observing a wedding-ring upon the woman's finger.

"Oui, Madame. I was foolish enough to marry ten years ago, when I was only seventeen. And here is the man who persuaded me to the folly." She grasped her husband's

arm, who stood near her, and turned him towards her questioner.

"I am not surprised," laughed Mrs. Wood. "He is very handsome. I hope he is good too, and makes you a kind husband."

"I cannot complain," returned the woman, who seemed proud of her husband. "He works well, and is industrious."

"Madame had better ask if she makes me a good wife," said the man. "That is a much more important matter, Rosalie."

"Madame can judge for herself," laughed Rosalie confidently. "It is needless to ask. Madame," turning to her questioner, "there is not a cleaner and more comfortable chaumière than ours, and no one wears better clothes than we do. We are the envy of the village. We save, too, and have some *économies* put by. Yet we always have meat on Sundays when we want it."

"Have you any children?"

"Two little angels, Madame, six and eight years old, a boy and a girl, and the boy is the eldest. They stay with the old mother, who looks after them when we are working in the fields. Presently, when we grow aged and cannot work, if we have not saved enough they will work for us. Children never forsake their parents in our village."

"And you," said Mrs. Wood, turning to the younger woman, still quite a girl; "you probably live at home with your mother, and help with the ménage."

"Ah, Madame," returned the elder woman, "you have guessed, but you have not guessed all. She lives with la mère, and helps with the ménage when there is no sowing or reaping

or weeding going on; but she is not content with her happy life. She is my sister, and is ten years younger than I. That is just the age when I married, and she is about to commit the same imprudence—with less excuse. My husband was handsome and hard-working—no one could resist him. But, l'homme de la sœur—there he stands," pointing to a small but good-looking youth of some twenty years, whose chief characteristic seemed an amiably weak expression. "There he is, Madame; jugez."

The girl laughed, and seemed satisfied. "You cannot blame me for doing what you did yourself," she remarked to her elder sister. "And there is no need to look on the dark side of things."

"Not at all," cried the young man, whose name was François. "When I marry, and life becomes serious, I shall be as industrious as your Marius, our chaumière as well kept as yours. Madame, I shall do my duty, and Jeanne will have no cause to repent."

"When are you to be married?" asked Mrs. Wood, interested in this modern Phyllis and Corydon.

"At the St. Martin," replied Jeanne. "It is our Ducasse, and we shall take a week's holiday, and spend part of it at Chambéry, where François has an uncle living. We shall be happy and have the needful," she cried, with the hopefulness of youth. "I am not afraid."

"Marius?" said Mrs. Wood, turning to the husband. "I heard you called Marius. But that is a Marseilles name, is it not? I do not remember to have met with it before in Savoie."

"Very probably, Madame," returned Marius. "My mother

was a Marseillaise. She came to Savoie with a noble family as femme de chambre to the lady. Here she met my father and married him; and when I was born she would insist upon calling me Marius. 'He will be as out of place as a crab on dry land,' said my father; 'I don't believe there is a single Marius in Savoie. People will call him an alien.' 'Not at all,' returned the mother; 'he will set the fashion.' But no other Marius has sprung up—the name won't take root here. And my mother wouldn't take root. With all her will, she couldn't help fretting after her own town and people; the love was stronger than herself, and, though she was happy with her husband, after three or four years, one fine morning, she quietly sat down in her chair and died."

"Died! So suddenly? Of what?"

"Of mal du pays," returned Marius simply. "She is not the first one who has died of the complaint, Madame. It is common enough in our country. The doctor pretended it was the heart, and so it was, but not just in the way he meant. Not that I should die of the same. I could be happy anywhere —with the wife."

So here too was a humble romance, of which the world is full. It appealed to Mrs. Wood, and henceforth the little group had a place in her memory. Her sympathies went out to the woman who had died more than twenty years ago of love for her people. In the imagination of the listener a romance weaved itself; here was a life that had been an unwritten poem.

Sometimes they would extend their walk into the heights, a quiet, sure-footed pony helping Mrs. Wood through the fatigue

of climbing. Amidst the unmelted snows they would come upon a small village, wonderfully out of the world. Nothing could be more beautiful and romantic, more suggestive than this cluster of houses, for which the cold of winter and the heat of summer marked the sole calendar of the year. Often the *patois* of such a village puzzled even Mr. Wood, whose quick ear had soon mastered very many of the provincialisms surrounding his foreign home. The inhabitants of these elevated abodes were in the last degree primitive, life being kept together by the simplest and barest necessaries. But the religious element was ever present amongst them, and at even-tide the Angelus bell never failed to ring out from the tiny church scarcely any village was without, and all the people would turn to prayer. To Mrs. Wood, with her responsive, reverent nature, there was something very moving in the faith of this simple people, who worshipped and never questioned, and in great measure carried out their religion in the quiet consistency of their lives; without aspirations, it is true; with no certainty beyond the day, but no undue or anxious thought for the morrow; simply trusting for the supply of their daily needs. How was it possible not to be deeply interested in all human concerns, when such evidences of good abounded?

The incident we have given may be thought almost too trifling for record, but it is an instance of much of what Mrs. Wood's life then was, and as such fulfils the purpose of these pages and cannot be uninteresting. Through such scenes she was constantly passing; with such characters and events she came into frequent contact; no doubt gaining experience, extending her knowledge of human nature, just as the bee flies

from flower to flower extracting honey. She entered into all the society of the neighbourhood; enjoying it, but never developing into a mere lover of fashion—a woman of the world. That could never have been; life was at all times too serious and earnest—its issues too momentous; and as the bee takes its best from the flower, so she managed to take the best from her surroundings.

It was a very active life in those days; as much so as when, in later years, she began to write and found she had not strength both for work and the world, it became comparatively quiet and retired. But by that time she had had a long and varied experience, had seen society in all its phases, and gathered up mental pictures for use. These her memory placed entirely at her command.

She became interested in the little group of which we have been writing. Their village was near at hand; and that evening in their walk they found them out and entered into closer acquaintance with their histories.

The old mother was seen, and the two cherubs. The dame was bowed and wrinkled, and seemed to have lived a hard life, which was the general rule; but with it all she looked placid and contented—an expression so many of the French peasants possess when the evening of life is closing round them. Her little thatched cottage, with its two rooms—a but and a ben, as the Scotch would say—was clean and spotless. Its outside walls might have been white-washed once a week —another prominent mark of the peasantry. If they possess any self-respect, or wish to be well considered, their first thought is to have an irreproachable tenement, however humble. And

it is thorough; if the outside be fair to look upon, depend upon it the interior is equally so. The inmates of an untidy house are held in small esteem. It is astonishing how much pride in their own little way distinguishes the best of them.

This old woman, evidently very poor, was as neat and clean in her dress as her walls were unblemished. She felt honoured by the notice given her by visitors, but, like most of her class, was not overwhelmed. In France there is no antagonism between the classes, but, on the contrary, an amicable feeling—a *bien entendu* which makes intercourse very possible and pleasant. The Lady Bountiful is less visible than in England. She is less needed, for the peasantry are industrious and saving, and generally fall into poverty only through some serious fault, such as dishonesty or idleness, both exceptions to the rule. The great lady of the château, therefore, visits them less to minister to their wants than because she takes a lively interest in their welfare.

"Monsieur et Madame were very good to visit her," said the old woman, coming out of her chimney-corner, where she was building up a peat fire which threw out a delicious scent suggestive of quiet neighbourhoods. "There were not many gentlefolk in the voisinage to take an interest in them. Monsieur and Madame de Pierrefond at the château were both too old now to go about much. Yes, her daughter was going to be married, though she might have waited until her old mother was under earth. You see, her husband died when Jeanne was a baby, and she had had nothing else to care for all these years—her other daughter married soon. But it was the way with young people; their mothers and

grandmothers had done the same before them; it was hereditary. On s'y attendait. And after all it would be very nearly the same as before. Jeanne was going to have the house next door, and it would be almost as one ménage. She would still help her old mother. A good girl would make a good wife, and no doubt she would always be a daughter to her."

And with words of sympathy for the old woman, and words of encouragement for the daughter, the visitors wended their way back to Aix-les-Bains, through the charming valley, beside the waters of the Lac du Bourget, more solemn and frowning than ever in the falling twilight; the solitary pile of the Haute Combe across the lake, rising amidst the whispering pine-trees. Round about them towered the lovely mountains of Savoie, outlined in beauty and majesty against the darkening sky.

ALPINE VILLAGE, SAVOIE.

CHAPTER XI

"And, doubtless, unto thee is given
A life that bears immortal fruit
In those great offices that suit
The full-grown energies of heaven."

GATEWAY, ANNECY.

THE day after the village episode our travellers continued their journey towards Annecy, host and hostess, backed by the whole personnel of the hotel, assembling to speed them on their way.

Those were days of simple manners and customs, yet of true dignity and consideration, notwithstanding that in France all classes were more or less in touch with each other. It was a usual thing for the entire establishment to turn out and group round the door of the inn to

wish "Bon voyage" to the departing guests, especially if by a gracious amiability they had made themselves popular and esteemed.

Mr. and Mrs. Wood continued their journey towards Annecy, the wildest and grandest part opening up towards the end—that narrow pass in which the Gorges du Fier entered upon the scene. Now the railway hurries past the openings in the rocks, giving the unfortunate traveller a momentary glimpse of falling water and roaring torrents; but in those days there was nothing to break the solitude or intrude upon the majesty of the landscape. At rare intervals a diligence or travelling carriage would pass their own, and that was all.

Villages here and there rose on the plains—the picturesque Alpine villages of Savoie with their simple inhabitants. Rumours seldom reached them from the outside world; newspapers were unknown; wars might be going on of which they knew nothing until all was over. The fame even of a Napoleon was dimly understood, never realised unless he passed with his armies on his way to fresh victories. Then cottage doors would close, alarmed faces peered through drawn blinds, and the simple people would crouch before a crucifix or an image of the Virgin, praying for deliverance and prosperity. Seed-time and harvest, tending cattle, eating the hard-earned daily bread—such was their life. Always the same simple nature; and to this hour there are little out-of-the-way spots where the peasants are less changed than would seem possible.

The Gorges du Fier, approaching Annecy, was, we have said,

the wildest part of the journey. Mr. and Mrs. Wood always planned to reach it in the morning, and would linger long. A roaring torrent leaped madly between its rocky walls, washing over great boulders smooth as ivory; frothing and seething as it tumbled into whirling eddies, and coursed onwards. Here, whilst the sun sensibly climbed higher, they would stand upon the old Roman bridge, gazing upon the Château of Montrottier and all the wonderful view disclosed. The rushing sound, the sense of power never absent from the torrent, delighted Mrs. Wood. Sometimes her husband would climb down impossible precipices, whilst she looked on in terror lest a false step should plunge him into the wild waters; to return presently with hands full of rare and beautiful ferns, more difficult to reach than the mountain Edelweiss. The roads, even in those days, were excellent, and had to be so, for they were the only means of communication with the outside world.

The travellers were wont to linger by their favourite torrent. Hours would glide away, the carriage wait and walk, and the postilions wonder what Monsieur et Madame saw in the unhappy rocks they could never pass without wasting a whole day in this barren wilderness. At last it would be over, and the final stage entered; and the horses, perhaps as impatient as the men, would start off with spirit. When the sun was declining, quaint old Annecy was reached, with its gateways and arcades, streets intersected by canals, and many signs and vestiges of the past. Here, in a church dedicated to him, lies St. Francis de Sales, and near him the remains of saintly Mère Chantal, for whom he had so great a regard and

fervent friendship. Here came Rousseau, after escaping from Geneva, before taking up his abode at the unpretending Charmettes: scenes and influences that find their record in his *Confessions*. The ancient castle on the lake still throws its reflections on the calm waters, but has lost much of its romantic interest in its latter-day destiny. Yet it still takes one back in spirit to feudal ages, and to times when cruelty and torture were rife in the land. Many horrible instruments are yet shown.

Passing beyond all this, skirting the borders of the lake—smiling as the Lac du Bourget was the opposite—they presently reached a château in the hills, where dwelt an intimate friend of Mr. Henry Wood, and all the refinements of life were found allied to a singular simplicity: where existence was a sort of pastoral symphony, with the hours unnumbered and the days unchecked.

The owner of this fair paradise—Monsieur de Beaussire—had mixed much in the gay and great world. An earnest politician, he had espoused certain Utopian views heart and soul on which his happiness and ambition depended. They failed, and in the disappointment of the moment he threw up everything, closed his house in Paris, and withdrew, with his wife and children, to his remote Savoie estate. His wife, a woman in ten thousand, submitted without a murmur to the exile.

"I thought it best not to oppose him," she confided one day to Mrs. Henry Wood. "Opposition only makes people more determined, and the reaction was bound to come. He has really too great a mind to bury it here for ever; but it

tarries long. We have now spent five years without change of scene. I scarcely remember Paris, and my best friends are beginning to forget me. The summers are charming; but the winters are beyond imagination."

"You have had great patience and wisdom," said Mrs. Wood. "Do you see no signs of a wish to return to life and politics—all his heart holds dear, though he tries to persuade himself to the contrary?"

"I do," was the answer. "I see things which tell me his mind is working round to its old desires. His views are altered, though he would hardly admit it, and when he goes back to politics he will succeed where before he failed. But the time is not quite yet. I give him two more years; we shall then have been here seven years, and every seven years, they say, brings a change. Seven years! To me it has been more like seventy."

The patient wife was correct in all she foresaw. Two years from that time her husband was again the centre of the political world of France. Their hotel in Paris was reopened and the brilliant life resumed. Years rolled on, and changes crept over the face of the country; the revolution of 1848 broke out; the King fled; and amongst those who remained and lost their lives was Monsieur de Beaussire.

His wife, good, patient, courageous, had died the previous year, removed from the evil to come; and in his last hour what he had looked upon as the great sorrow of his life he declared to have become his greatest blessing. The thought of rejoining his wife reconciled him to death. A rare nature

in a Frenchman; for the men of France then, as now, troubled themselves very little about religion, which they left to women and the priesthood.

Meanwhile we have said that life at the Château de Beaussire was a pastoral symphony, and a whole week would be passed amidst all the famous spots of the neighbourhood. The house where St. Bernard was born; ruined monasteries unknown to the world, but reposing in dreams of sylvan beauty; more distant excursions to the hills and the ice-caves of Parmelan; the whole family sometimes setting out on horseback. But on these occasions Mrs. Wood, ever too delicate and timid to ride, remained at home.

A charming and happy week; and the hours would pass quickly, as only hours and days can pass spent amongst friends who are absolutely congenial to each other.

Monsieur de Beaussire was a brilliant conversationalist, and far from turning misanthrope with his self-imposed banishment, he seemed to have thrown off all the weight of a political life for the light-heartedness almost of childhood. It was, indeed, this happy temperament which had enabled his wife to bear her exile. She saw nothing of the world, but infinitely more of her husband's society, and admirable as had been their mutual relations in the busy Capital, it was as nothing compared with the mutual devotion which sprang up during these years of retirement: a devotion never relaxed when they returned to a more active life.

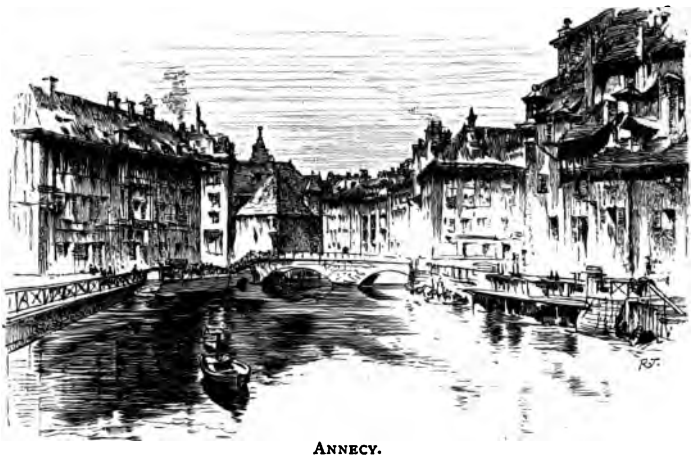
All their spare hours were given to each other; and to friends less faithfully constituted they became almost an amusement and a proverb. But their happiness was short-

lived. Monsieur and Madame de Beaussire were both comparatively young when they were called upon to renounce life and all the pomps and pleasures they had used so well and wisely.

The week's visit of which we are writing extended itself to ten days, and then Mr. and Mrs. Wood bade a reluctant goodbye to their friends, returning home by the way they had come. But there were times when they would vary their route —pass through the lovely mountainous country into Switzerland, linger by the Lake of Geneva, and glide about its fair waters. Geneva, Lausanne, Ouchy, the whole neighbourhood was sacred to romance and history. Rousseau and Voltaire, Byron with his charm, and Shelley with his dreams, all had left their impression and influence behind them. Here Gibbon had finished his *Decline and Fall;* here Madame de Staël had lived with her father; here Byron wrote his *Prisoner of Chillon* and immortalised the spot in *Childe Harold.* Near Chillon Rousseau had placed his scene in *Héloïse*, and they loved to gaze on its frowning walls, where Bonivard lingered out six years of his life, then to regain freedom, turn Protestant, and become the brave husband of four wives. Passing over the Jura, from the summit they beheld the blue waters of the lake spread out far beneath them, whilst Mont Blanc—first seen from the heights of Fourvière as a distant dream—rose near at hand in all its glory. From the lake flowed the first waters of the Rhone, blue and transparent, but to become turbid and troubled as the river passed through Lyons on its way to the Mediterranean. In after years Mrs. Wood loved to talk of these bygone days and experiences.

But on the visit to which we have referred they had engagements at home, and returned quickly, staying one night only at Aix-les-Bains. We may be sure the little family we have described was not forgotten. It was a week nearer the Ducasse, the village wedding a week nearer its fulfilment, Jeanne a week happier. Even Jacqueline, the wife of Marius, had become more reconciled, and professed to have some hope of the bridegroom.

What has become of them all, one wonders. The French peasantry sometimes live to a great age, and it is just possible that Jeanne and François are a bowed and bent grandfather and grandmother, waiting their hour. More probably both are at rest beneath two little wooden crosses. In the chances and changes of the world, they may even have been sleeping side by side in death for the last half-century.



ANNECY.

CHAPTER XII

"Be near me when I fade away,
To point the term of human strife,
And on the low dark verge of life
The twilight of eternal day."

APPROACHING THE GRANDE CHARTREUSE.

ANOTHER journey—everything was a journey in those days—may be recorded, because it had in it something of the adventurous, and was of a nature no one on earth but Mr. Henry Wood would have thought of or attempted. Nothing daunted him; an idea entering his head was sufficient reason for its being acted upon. No matter how impossible, his sanguine temperament saw nothing not easily

accomplished. Nothing was an effort. His thoughts were too rapid; he had unlimited confidence in himself; and he seldom paused to weigh his ideas. He saw in a moment what he considered ought to be done, and it was done without thought of results.

We linger over this period of Mrs. Henry Wood's career, as we have said, because it was her first introduction to foreign life, and made a vivid impression upon her, colouring her after days: a time ever much in her thoughts, and of which she was ever ready to talk to those who loved to listen. And it was that enchanting and romantic period — early married life—when, as a rule, everything is bright, the world all *couleur de rose*, one's home an enchanted castle, of which the two principal beings are magicians. Troubles are as yet unseen, unrealised, and in every individual case the magic pair think they will prove the one exception to the rule: cares and anxieties are not for them, no clouds will come between—just as it is said that we think every one mortal but ourselves.

We also linger because of Mrs. Henry Wood's after career very little can be written. The life so fair in the beginning was presently to drink deeply of the waters of affliction. Dark clouds rolled over her brilliant sky and for a time obscured the sunshine.

But meanwhile all was bright; it was spring weather, with skies and verdure only found in climes where everything is beautified by a sparkling atmosphere. It was a very forward year, and the leafy freshness was in full glory. One morning Mr. Henry Wood came up to his wife, who was reclining in

her drawing-room. "I have an idea," he said, "and only want your consent to put it into execution."

"What is it?" she returned, smiling; for her husband had many ideas, and some of them had to be reduced to ordinary proportions by common-sense. "Have you found the elixir of life, or the philosopher's stone, or Aladdin's lamp?"

"Better than all," he laughed. "My idea has been suggested by this splendid weather. I have a few spare days, and it is a sin to waste them here. I should like to take you to the Grande Chartreuse, and acquaint you with all the beauties of that wonderful drive."

"The Grande Chartreuse!" exclaimed Mrs. Wood. "But that is a monastery. I might as well offer to conduct you to that far-off Convent where my cousin gave up life and became Sœur Marie-Ursule, dead to the world. You would not be admitted beyond a *salle de réception;* I should not even be admitted to so much at the Grande Chartreuse."

"But we should spend a week amidst some of the wonders of nature—a week to remember all our lives," urged her husband.

"That I grant," was the reply; "and if you wish it, I am ready to go with you. But you may have to spend a night at the monastery, and what will become of poor me during the time?"

"That is serious," he laughed; "but not so serious as it appears. If I do have to spend a night there—I don't think it will be necessary—an establishment close by, inhabited by nuns, I believe, would receive you, and you would be as safe as you are at home."

"You make me feel nervous," returned Mrs. Wood, laughing also. "They might refuse to give me up again. One has heard of such things."

"Are you willing to run the risk?"

"Quite willing. I think they will probably be only too glad to get rid of me; for in their eyes I suppose I am an unhappy heretic."

"And then, as to your not seeing the inside of the monastery, I am not so sure upon the point," continued Mr. Wood. "I think I can promise that at least you shall visit the refectory and cloisters."

"But I thought women were not admitted over the threshold? What Open Sesame would unbar the doors to me?"

"Ah!" he laughed. "The impossible in life often becomes possible if we only know how to go to work. I will tell you my secret. The Brother who is doorkeeper at present, and often accompanies people over the monastery, was not always a monk. He has, indeed, not very long been a monk; and he is not a full-fledged monk now. He was a gentleman and a man who always interested me. It was once in my power to render him a service for which I earned his undying gratitude. There is nothing on earth he would not do for me, even to risking his present position, which of course I would never permit. But I am acquainted with the ways of the monastery, which I have often visited, and know where there is risk and where there is none. But the future shall decide. When shall we start? Can you be ready to-morrow morning?"

"Quite ready," replied Mrs. Wood, who always made a

point of yielding to her husband's wishes when it was possible and of falling in with his plans, as good wives do. And on the following morning they started—a morning as bright and fair and full of promise as many of the days that had gone before.

The air was fresh and clear — that wonderful clearness only to be found amongst mountains. These same mountains rose majestically on all sides, many of their summits still snow-capped; a cold, strange contrast to the warm sunshine and brilliant sky. The fair river ran silently towards the far-off sea; and the travellers, crossing it by an old bridge, no doubt still standing, passed out of sight and sound of the town.

They made a long round of their journey for the sake of the magnificent scenery that everywhere abounded. Here, too, the roads were excellent; but occasionally a small mountain pass had to be climbed with difficulty and descended with care. Pine-trees grew far up the mountain sides, dark and sombre but ever charming, scenting the air, a delicious repose to the eye; and where pine forests were not, often the hill-sides were covered with vegetation of soft luxuriance—vines growing like currant bushes, still rather bare and wintry-looking, but soon to burst into leaf. The mulberry tree stood in profusion in the plains for the sake of the industrious silkworm, here cultivated by millions; its lovely cocoons spun into silk and presently woven into the rich material for which Lyons in France and Spitalfields in England were so famous in those days.

Journeying, they often heard the sound of the loom issuing from an open cottage door; and sometimes would stop the

carriage and alight, pay the weaver a visit, and bring a gleam of sunshine into his quiet existence. These visits would break for a moment the monotony of constant movement, and rest the travellers. Often they came upon an unexpected village tragedy or romance, as they had come upon the little group near Aix-les-Bains; and the simple villagers were ready with their confidences. Now it was a hard winter which made it difficult to keep the *pot au feu* boiling; now a lonely grave in the churchyard, on which the turf had not yet had time to grow, and the sound of the mother's voice still echoed in the *chaumière*, and the little wide-eyed children ran about neglected; again it was the gayer subject of a wedding a week old, and the new wife stood blushing and happy at the chimney corner, young and blooming; and the young and handsome husband, dividing his time between weaving and the cultivation of his garden, had not yet put on the pale look of middle-age.

There was an abundant study of human nature in its humbler forms in these journeys; material for many a village pastoral, such as George Sand so vividly describes in *La Petite Fadette*, *François le Champi*, and those wonderful idylls which charm by their simplicity and faithfulness. But George Sand writes of a very different part of the country, where also the loom is sometimes heard with its whir, and the shuttle flies to and fro; where one room often does duty for everything, and in a corner there shines out a magnificent carved oak press worth its weight in gold, and the people to this day have kept their first primitiveness, and often their dress. Yet the Morbihan could never produce such magnificent and romantic scenery as that through which our travellers journeyed

on their way to the Grande Chartreuse. The peasants on the road were few—the women wearing the enormous straw bonnets still occasionally seen in the Dauphiné. The waggons were generally drawn by oxen.

At length they approached the end of their journey, and entered St. Laurent du Pont. The place was little more than a hamlet in those days, with a very primitive inn, but shelter and accommodation were fairly good, and travellers not infrequently put up there on their way to the famous monastery. It seemed that Mr. Wood had slightly changed his plans, for here, he announced, and not at the Grande Chartreuse, they would pass the night.

They had entered St. Laurent about eleven in the morning, their journey that day having been a very short one. After a simple *déjeuner*, they returned to the carriage, and began to ascend the wonderful pass.

Immediately after leaving the village the narrow gorge was entered—a gorge wild and beautiful. The monastery was about ten miles distant, the ascent almost continual. They had left the world behind them, and were journeying into the solitary mountains. Nothing but a small, noisy running stream and the road separated the two ranges. The water was of transparent emerald, clear as crystal. Great boulders of rock stood out, the stones worn into quaint forms by the ever-flowing stream. Small cascades ran down the mountain sides, shining through the pine-trees like silver threads.

At Fourvoirie they passed a forge romantically situated near the torrent, a most picturesque object. In front the mountains appeared to close in; a wealth of verdure overhung

the water, here spanned by an old gray stone bridge. To all this the forge gave life and colouring: as forges always do, no matter where, for they are a remnant of barbarism pregnant with mystery. Hard by there was a charming waterfall, and beyond this the ruined bridge of the old road, used by the monks in the days of their first estate: who certainly were determined to place a barrier between themselves and the world when they built their parent institution in this almost inaccessible spot.

But what a wonderful eye for beauty they had, those monks; what an appreciation of nature; how invariably they found out where the best trout-streams ran, so that they might not only possess an innocent pastime, but an abundant supply of wholesome and unforbidden food. When St. Bruno wandered into this wilderness and there pitched his tent and built him a small chapel, he must have had some prejudice against the world, some terrible disappointment which caused him to choose this remote spot; but he must also have felt the solemn grandeur of the mountains a never-ending source of consolation and delight. An appalling solitude, nevertheless.

At length the pass widened a little; the snow-capped mountains receded and formed an amphitheatre; the perpendicular rocks passed away, and sloping hill-sides, covered with pine-trees, gave the scene a less wild and desolate aspect. In the midst of this wonderful amphitheatre Mr. Henry Wood presently pointed out to his wife the huge, quaint, ugly pile of the monastery, with its straggling buildings and dependencies—its slanting roofs and small turrets; a high

IN THE DAUPHINÉ.

dead wall encircling an immense area, within which the monks walked on ordinary days.

The carriage stopped not very far from the front entrance, and Mr. Wood, getting out alone, went up to the huge door, and the sound of a bell echoed through the building. Soon the door opened cautiously, and the pale, refined, singularly handsome face of a Frère Procureur looked out upon the world.

On recognising the new arrival, rapture took the place of the resigned expression which characterises most of the monks, as if there were nothing more to hope for from life; the door was thrown wide; the visitor's hand was seized with every token of grateful affection. Then he passed in, and the door closed upon him. In five minutes' time he came out again; and Mrs. Wood afterwards knew that this was part of the conversation that had taken place.

"To what happy chance do I owe this surprise?" from the Frère Procureur. "It is life from the dead."

"I am here for a special purpose," replied Mr. Wood. "Are you not glad to see me?"

"I tell you it is as life from the dead," returned the monk with fervour. "To see you and hear your voice I would at any moment accept a month's penance. Have you come straight from home?"

"We have been some days on the road, loitering amidst those scenes you have yourself so much loved—never more splendid than now. But you, shut up within these walls——"

"Hush," cried the monk painfully. "Do not remind me of days passed for ever. Do not reopen wounds hardly yet

closed. Rather pray that I may grow resigned to this silence of the tomb, this death in life. Not that I would undo what I have done, or go back to the world I have abandoned. I am only upset for the moment at hearing your voice and grasping your hand. It brings back the lost life so vividly. But I am resigned and not unhappy."

"I am glad to hear it," returned Mr. Wood, "but I am surprised, for you are taking refuge in a life altogether unsuited to you. You were never intended for a monk, and I told you at the time you would repent it. But you were obstinate, Julien——"

"Hush!" again interrupted the monk. "I left that name behind me when I entered here; do not awaken happier thoughts by using it. Now I am Frère Jeronimo."

"And are you really resigned and happy? If so, the expression of your face when you opened the door belied you."

Frère Jeronimo hesitated a moment. "The change from the busy world to this living tomb has been great," he replied at length. "At first the contrast was severe—the transition too abrupt. The silence and solemnity appalled me; I admit it. There ought, I think, to be intermediate stages or establishments, so that one might gradually become accustomed to this entombment. But I am growing used to it. Believe me, I am not unhappy and I do not repent. If I had to do it over again I doubt if I should hesitate. What has the world done for me, after all? What have I found in it that I should care to renounce? Yet now and then I find myself dwelling with a certain longing upon the past—just as if I had found it all an earthly paradise."

They had passed into the Salle de Bourgogne, a refectory given over to the use of visitors. It was empty, and the brother went up to a large press or cupboard, and, taking out some Chartreuse, offered a glass to his visitor.

"I thought I saw your carriage not far off," he remarked; "and I also thought I saw——"

"Never mind what you thought," interrupted Mr. Wood. "Are you alone in the monastery — no visitors staying here?"

"None whatever; nor likely to have any."

"Good. Shall you be on guard to-night?"

"No; but the brother whose turn it is is a sleepy fellow, and will only too gladly give it up to me—if you wish it."

"I want to come and hear the midnight mass——"

"Nothing easier," interrupted Frère Jeronimo.

"Yes; but I wish to bring a friend with me."

"Why not?"

"A friend who will be dressed as a monk, of whom you must ask no questions, and who will not speak to you."

"A mystery!" laughed the brother. "This really suggests the world, and I thought I had done with mysteries and the world for ever."

"You will be quite alone? We shall not be likely to meet any one?—any of the fathers or brothers?"

"Not a creature. Be here three minutes after the clock has struck midnight. The door will be a little open. I shall be absolutely alone. The corridors will be empty. Every one will have gone in to the midnight mass. I might take you from one end of the building to the other without fear of

interruption. But I do not understand. How do you purpose arriving here at midnight? It is an unearthly hour—unless you are staying in the monastery."

"Leave that to me," was the reply. "At three minutes after your clock has struck midnight you will find us here. Remember it is full moon, and the night will be almost as light as day."

"It is the day for the monks to take their walk," said the brother as they separated. "Go into the mountains, and you will see them. But if you are not alone, do not speak to them. They will not look at you."

For some two hours after this Mr. and Mrs. Wood wandered in the pine-scented woods, revelling in the wonderful wealth and beauties of nature—their path a perfect carpet of green moss, wild flowers and ferns; hardy plants that grew in these high latitudes. The silence and solitude were intense, for out of sight of the monastery buildings they might have been in the wilds of a desert.

But presently the solitude was broken. Suddenly they came upon the monks, cloaked and cowled, filing through an upward path—a strange patchwork of humanity upon the mountain side.

They were all conversing together, as if they had much to say, and were making up for a whole week's silence. Yet what could they have to talk about—these men who had long ago renounced life, and knew little or nothing of what was going on in the world? It was difficult to imagine. But their voices rose clear and loud, and they seemed to be making the most of their week's "half-holiday." Silent at all other

times, they are even commanded to talk on these occasions. Our travellers watched them until they disappeared, but long after that the echo of their voices might be heard in the sparkling atmosphere—a strange sound in these mountain regions.

"And so I suppose I was not allowed to see even the refectory and the cemetery?" remarked Mrs. Wood. "I am not disappointed, for I did not think it possible, even with the help of your friend the Frère Procureur."

"All in good time," was the laughing reply. "You don't know what may yet be in store for you."

They had re-entered the carriage, and were returning to St. Laurent du Pont. At the forge the blacksmith was wielding his hammer, and the travellers alighted and spoke to him, for he was no stranger to Mr. Wood, to whom the neighbourhood was well known, and whose name bore weight and influence in the country. At length St. Laurent was reached.

"And now you must rest," said Mr. Wood to his wife. "Our day is not over, and I am afraid your strength will be a little taxed. I intend to take you for a drive to-night, and to show you by moonlight all the wonders you have just seen in sunshine."

"But will it not be too much for me?" objected Mrs. Wood, in her surprise. "Do you think I shall be able to stand it? And are not the nights still cold?"

"I will take every care of you," was the reply; "and I have thought of everything. It will not be a very cold night, and I have an extra cloak for you in my portmanteau. As for fatigue, you will be too absorbed in the scene to dream of

being tired. You don't know what wild gorges and snow-capped mountains and dense pine forests are under the moonlight magic."

"I think I can imagine all that," replied Mrs. Wood, laughing; "and I also think the night drive rather a wild idea, but I am quite ready to take it if you wish it. At what hour shall we start?"

"At ten o'clock."

"And do you mean to go quite up to the monastery?"

"Up to the very doors."

"That will make it midnight—the witching hour. We shall see ghosts," laughed Mrs. Wood—"the ghosts of all the dead-and-gone monks who have lived up there for the last seven hundred years. What an army there would be! Henry, it is a wild scheme of yours—and all for a little moonlight!"

THE GRANDE CHARTREUSE.

CHAPTER XIII

"When in the down I sink my head,
Sleep, Death's twin-brother, times my breath;
Sleep, Death's twin-brother, knows not Death,
Nor can I dream of thee as dead."

CLOISTERS, GRANDE CHARTREUSE.

THE day passed on, Mrs. Wood resting until eight o'clock. At eight they dined, and at ten re-entered the carriage and began their morning's experience over again.

"What have you there?" asked Mrs. Wood, seeing her husband come out with something over his arm. "A funny brown cloak, with a *capuchon*. It is not mine—I never wore brown in my life. You have made some mistake, Henry."

"It is all right," he laughed. "You may find it cold up in the mountains, and may want an extra cloak whilst walking about."

They set out. It was a magnificent night, and not cold. The full moon sailed majestically in a cloudless sky. In the narrow gorge all was dark and impenetrable. They could hear the running water, but could not see it; nor the ferns, nor the brushwood, nor the overhanging trees. The forge was closed, its owner no doubt sleeping the sleep of the just and the hard-worked; but the penetrating moonbeams threw it into light and shade, together with the old bridge close to which it stood. All looked ghostly and mysterious in the pale light, backed by the high snow-capped mountains and dense pine woods.

The quiet of day had been nothing to this midnight hush. The carriage made slow progress, the urging postboy and treading horses alone breaking in upon the solemn silence and repose. Within about half a mile of the monastery Mr. Wood stopped the carriage, bade it remain there, and they alighted and walked. Calm and peaceful was the night, and now the stillness was that of a dead world. Not the cry of a bird, not the fluttering of a wing broke upon the air. The mountains stood in utter solitude and majesty, twice magnified in the pale moonlight.

They stood and listened to the silence. A faint breeze went whispering through the pine forests, as if the spirits of the dead-and-gone monks of many an age were abroad. A little ahead they now saw the ghostly monastic pile looming out in the moonlight, which glittered upon the slanting roofs

and found its reflection in some of the windows. As they walked, the turret-clock struck the witching hour, and twelve strokes slowly rang out upon the midnight air: signal for the ghosts to appear, if any existed.

It was a solemn moment, an inexpressibly solemn and magnificent scene. A tremulousness seized Mrs. Wood for an instant, and her husband quickly enveloped her in the cloak he carried over his arm. She did not observe that it was a counterpart of a monk's cloak, lined with soft white fur. "I am not cold," she said, submitting passively to his care. "If I shivered, I think it was at the effect of this wonderful scene, and the sudden striking of midnight—a ghostly sound in the stillness."

And now they were almost at the very door of the monastery. "Henry," said Mrs. Wood, startled by a sudden thought, "you are surely not going in, to leave me here alone?"

"My dear!" he protested. "I am going to take you to see the refectory, and the cloisters and graveyard in the moonlight. Now that we are here it would be a pity to miss all this. It is all arranged: I have permission. But within the walls it is cold; let me draw your hood."

It was no sooner said than done; and Mrs. Wood might have been mistaken for a young diminutive monk or novice; the face almost hidden by the *capuchon*, nothing visible but the outlines of the small slender form. All had passed so suddenly that there was no time for thought or question.

The door was a little open. Evidently their voices or footsteps had been heard; Frère Jeronimo was listening at his

post, for the door opened wider, and the pale, refined face of the monk, almost hidden by the cowl, shone out in the moonlight.

"C'est bien vous," he whispered. "Follow me. Fear nothing. I am alone. The *matines* have commenced."

They passed in, and the door closed on profound darkness. Striking a light in a lantern, he took the lead without turning or looking, and without a word led the way to the refectory: the Salle de Bourgogne: a large white-washed room, with long bare tables. At the end of a table, near the door, on a plate stood two small glasses of Chartreuse, the bottle at hand. With a half smile Mr. Wood offered one to his wife, knowing well it would be refused, but did not refuse one himself in those cold quarters. Always the most abstemious of men, no one was a better judge of good wine, or appreciated it more in moderation: a man of refined taste as well as of artistic temperament.

The Salle de Bourgogne was full of ghostly shadows, which danced and flitted over walls and ceiling as the lantern moved in the hand of the monk. It looked bare, cold and cheerless; exactly the room fitted for men who had passed for ever from the world and given up their lives to fasting and vigil. Yet, as we have said, it was not the secluded refectory of the monks, but the public room set apart for those who from curiosity or some worthier motive visited the monastery; perhaps to spend a day or two within its hospital walls: a hospitality confined to the most meagre and penitential fare. All were privileged to wander about halls and corridors, cloisters and graveyard; to come and go as they would; but if they asked to be admitted to the realms where the celebrated

liqueur was made, and to be shown its secrets, an ominous shake of the head with indrawn lips was the sole response. If in the corridors they met a father or brother, the cowl was more closely drawn, nothing was seen but the outline of a pale subdued face and eyes that seemed full of a sad introspection. A Trappist would have murmured "Memento Mori" in passing, but the Carthusians are vowed to silence. At all times there have been those who have braved the ordeal of nights in a cloister, attracted by the sense of mystery attached to every monkish community. Have we not all felt this, even in deserted monasteries that perhaps have not echoed for centuries to the sound of sandalled footsteps and midnight chanting? The element still lurks in the silent corridors, the ghostly atmosphere still hangs about the empty cell; the spirits of dead-and-gone monks haunt every turning and corner, and will do so as long as the stones are left one upon another.

Passing out of the refectory, the brother still guiding, they went rapidly down a long passage which presently led them to the cloisters and little cemetery. All shone out clearly and distinctly in the moonlight, and the pavement was flecked with ghostly shadows. Small wooden crosses marked where the dead lay in solemn peace and repose. The whole atmosphere of the place at this witching hour was weird and wonderful, the scene strangely beautiful and impressive. They lingered only long enough to take it all in, a never-fading recollection; then the brother, who had stood silent and motionless, again moved and led the way.

Once more through one long silent passage and another; then up a short staircase; the light extinguished; a door

quietly opened; and they stood in a dark gallery, looking down upon a singular scene. A small, long chapel, a row of monks down each side, cloaked and cowled; each monk had a lantern near him, and these lanterns alone lighted up the place, which was in semi-darkness. Not a ray penetrated to the gallery; the greater part of the chapel was in gloom, and the altar at the far end could only be faintly outlined. The monks themselves were in shadow only relieved by the flickering lanterns. A few only had thrown back their hoods, and the lantern-light threw its pale glare upon cadaverous faces that seemed consumed with an inward fire of penitence or regret.

Nothing human could have looked more ghostly. They were chanting Gregorian music, melancholy and monotonous enough for a dirge—a perpetual funeral hymn, a Nunc Dimittis from the world. Occasionally one of the fathers rose, took up his lantern, flitted like a phantom down the aisle, between the two rows of kneeling monks, and, taking his place at a lectern, would chant for a short time from a book, guided by his own light, and then return to his seat. So it has been for centuries; so it still is to-day; for the Grande Chartreuse, in consideration of the revenue it brings to the Government by the sale of its liqueur, has not been abolished.

After a time Frère Jeronimo turned, opened the door near which he stood, and they passed out of the gallery. The door closed, and the voices of the monks became distant and unreal. The visit was over.

During the whole time Mrs. Wood had felt as one in a dream; and as one in a dream she now passed down the staircase and through the long, cold vaulted corridors. Once

more they stood in the entrance hall, the door opened, admitting a flood of moonlight; a pressure of the hand was all that passed between Mr. Wood and Frère Jeronimo, and the door closed upon the midnight visitors. They were in the outer world again, surrounded by the wholesome influence of the sky, the mountains and pine forests, and heaven's pure air. Then, and then only, Mrs. Wood breathed freely.

"If I had known, I could not have undertaken it!" was all the remonstrance she ever uttered. "Suppose by some chance—such things will happen—we had been discovered?"

"My dear," returned her husband, "it was impossible. I knew what I was about, and so did Frère Jeronimo, as he calls himself now. You don't suppose I would have subjected you to the slightest risk. But I was determined that you should see the inside of a monastery, if it could be managed, and hear something of a midnight mass. It seemed a pity you should take this moonlight drive, and not have this at the end of it. Nor was it difficult, as you perceive; and you are not the first of your sex by many who has seen a monastic interior. The happiest man to-night in that building is Frère Jeronimo at the thought of having rendered me a service. But our visit must be kept a profound secret for his sake. What an existence!"

And Mrs. Wood never knew whether the remembrance gave her pleasure or pain. A nervousness had come upon her in that midnight gallery she never liked to recall. But in after years she would often lose herself in a vision of that wonderful drive, the moonlit mountains and forests, the weird and ghostly silence upon all. For many a long

day she could hear the solemn tolling of midnight upon the startled air, and imagine that she saw phantom forms flitting up the mountain passes, in and out of the dense pine forests.

They found the carriage where they had left it, the horses' heads turned towards St. Laurent. And what Mr. Wood had remarked was quite true: the strange novelty of the scene and situation had driven away fatigue. It is also certain, as we have said, that no one but he, daring in all his thoughts, accustomed to success, to his own will and way, with energy and activity beyond the lot of most men, would have planned such an excursion.

Twenty years ago, when the writer visited the monastery, he asked the Frère Procureur—then Frère Gerasime—of Frère Jeronimo. For answer the brother led the way to the cemetery, and pointed to a grave marked by a small wooden cross. Frère Jeronimo had been lying there ten years. Whatever his history, whatever the troubles and sorrows for which he had fled from the world, all was over. He was at rest.

Frère Gerasime himself was a fat, round-faced, good-humoured brother, who could not speak without laughing, and looked as if life had been a series of feast days, instead of the fasts the monastery imposed. Care and trouble had never driven him from the world; but rather a certain indolence of disposition, an unwillingness to take thought for the things of the morrow, well suited to a monastic life. The days and the years passed quietly and peacefully; he had no care or concern; it was not brave, perhaps, but it suited him; and as Frère Procureur he came into frequent and pleasant contact with visitors, who brought in with them a sufficient atmosphere of

the outside world to content him. He said that he was perfectly happy, and his appearance confirmed his words.

Full of variety, full of movement, full of charm was the life of Mrs. Wood at this period. Much more of those days might be recorded, for they were full of incident; but sufficient has been written to place before the reader a picture of that far-off time when as yet neither trouble on the one side nor fame on the other had laid its hand upon the author of *East Lynne*.

But it was a quiet life. There were no great dramas to be recorded. Life is not made up of dramas, but of commonplace, everyday events. Happy those lives that are without dramas. Mrs. Henry Wood's days flowed in a calm, even stream, surrounded by friends, by everything heart could desire; a husband who was most popular amongst men, and failed in nothing but the administration of his own affairs. Amongst other great works, he undertook to establish and bring into operation one or two of the large French railways, and, in spite of great opposition, by his influence and powers of organisation he triumphantly succeeded. Nothing was beyond his grasp—nothing excepting his personal interests. He was extremely wealthy at one time simply because wealth would and did come to him; and he might have become, without effort, one of the richest men in France. But the fickle goddess will not be courted for ever; there comes a time when she withdraws her favours if they are lightly esteemed.

Of society and much of its higher ranks Mrs. Wood had abundant experience. Her true and steadfast nature was formed for friendship of the highest description, and she never lost a friend once made. She was as popular and

beloved in her way as her husband was in his. Many lifelong intimacies were the result; most of them amongst the French —that nation she grew so much to like, and in whom she saw so much that was good. Her earnest purpose seemed to draw out all that was best in those she saw frequently. She always thought good of every one. Without guile herself, she never saw guile in others. Yet the smallest deviation from the right path filled her with a nameless horror, which in later years—as a friend has observed who only knew her in later years—might have made her severe but that she possessed in so large a measure the "charity that thinketh no evil."

But the life we have described was not to last. There came a day when their early home knew them no more, when much that life held dear and sacred had to be parted from for ever. What that parting was to Mrs. Wood will never be known. She never spoke of it. It must have been trouble too deep for words, setting its seal upon her for all time. With her husband it was quite different. He lost none of his gaiety or charm; his sanguine nature saw all things in rose-colour. Probably he never had a day's depression throughout life.

We know not with whom to compare Mrs. Henry Wood in her years of trial. No life opening in brilliancy was ever for a time more clouded by sorrow and suffering; but through all she was the quiet and refined gentlewoman whose simple, undemonstrative piety emphatically rendered her home blessed and sacred. In those days and years her profoundly religious nature came to her aid, and enabled her to pass through heart-troubles and worldly cares with the calmness, almost the exaltation of a

saint. She rose above them in every sense of the word. No protest ever went up to Heaven — "Lord, why am I thus afflicted?" But, on the contrary — "Thou doest all things well!" The first verse of the first Psalm for the day of her birth — the 17th of the month — became often a silent prayer in days of trial. This was never told, but an incident once occurred which caused us to feel that it was so. Even in times of deep sorrow she never failed to think and to utter from inmost feeling and conviction — "For Thou, Lord, art good and gracious: and of great mercy unto them that call upon Thee." For years it was her practice to retire to her room for half an hour every evening alone; and the half-hour was spent in fervent prayer and earnest reading and meditation, in renewing strength for the trials of daily life.

Mr. Wood's spirit and lightness, it has been said, never forsook him. He was at all times charming, brilliant, full of life. "To-morrow the roses and garlands will fade," the poet sings; with Mr. Wood it was the opposite. To-morrow dead roses and garlands would bloom again. He lived in Utopia. Yet only in the things that concerned himself. In all concerning others he was an excellent counsellor, quick-judging, and with admirable common-sense. He would frequently give many days and much thought to the affairs of a friend—in which he had no more personal interest than in the ebb and flow of the tide—and overcome difficulties that would have landed any one else in disaster.

Perhaps, after all, we are not describing a very uncommon character; but it is rare when allied to such intellectual powers as Mr. Wood possessed.

France continued to be their home for many years. They both loved the country. At one time, indeed, Mr. Wood had almost been persuaded into becoming a naturalised Frenchman, and was only checked by the fact that his sons would then be under French rule, liable to conscription and other laws affecting the liberty of the subject. No doubt it would have added to his influence; but he was a true Englishman at heart; and, his mind once made up to remain an Englishman, the question passed, and never again came under consideration.

France, we say, continued to be their home. They both loved it, and had many friends in various parts of the country whom it was a great pleasure occasionally to meet. Mrs. Wood's health was also very delicate at times, and it was supposed that the climate of France was more suited to her than that of England.

APPROACHING THE GRANDE CHARTREUSE.

CHAPTER XIV

" Till all at once beyond the will
I hear a wizard music roll,
And through a lattice on the soul
Looks thy fair face and makes it still."

ST. WOLFRAM'S.

THE following incident does not belong to this period of Mrs. Wood's life. Many years had passed away; much had happened. *East Lynne* had been published some time, and Mr. Wood had recently died. All the old life had ceased to be, a new order reigned. But as an incident of travel it seems a fitting conclusion to the pages that have gone before.

Mrs. Wood had always been an excellent traveller to whom fear was unknown. Yet at the time of which we are writing there had grown upon her a singular phase of nervousness: she felt it almost impossible to cross the Channel. She, who had crossed it many times in roughest weather without the slightest hesitation, at last found that the calmest day was beyond her courage.

It arose from the circumstance that once when crossing from Dieppe the machinery broke down. The sea was frightfully rough, and the vessel came to a standstill until what was wrong could be put right. This took nearly twelve hours, and during part of that time they were in a certain amount of danger. There was much alarm on board amongst the passengers, and Mrs. Wood grew nervous, though maintaining her usual outward calmness. At length the machinery was repaired, the vessel proceeded, and fears subsided.

But the voyage, in place of being under six hours, was nearly eighteen, and there had been much anxiety on shore respecting the safety of the boat. Instead of landing in daylight the passengers now landed in the night, and Mrs. Wood, possessing excellent sight by day, suffered from what is known as night-blindness—an inability to distinguish surrounding objects visible to others. In passing from the boat to the train she fell over a rope, and in the fall her hand was so badly sprained that for many years after she had to wear at times an elastic bandage designed for her by Sir Henry Thompson. Altogether the voyage had been trying; and from that time a fear of crossing the Channel by the longer route grew more and more strong, until the effort became too great an ordeal.

Thus it happened that once when she was desirous of joining her friend Mrs. Milner-Gibson at Dieppe, rather than take the voyage by way of Newhaven, she preferred to cross to Boulogne, and take the longer and at that time tedious though interesting journey by land. On that occasion she was accompanied by one of her sons. The short sea journey was passed without trouble, and the train carried the travellers on to Abbeville. Here the night had to be spent: the remainder of the journey would be taken by diligence, which started the next morning.

Perhaps Abbeville has changed less than many places, and yet it is now very different from what it was in those days. Mrs. Wood had never visited Abbeville, although well acquainted with the neighbourhood, and was delighted with the quaint old town, sleepy and quiet, yet full of a bygone charm and of old-world architecture. Above the banks of the river rose a long row of wonderful houses whose gabled roofs found their reflections in the placid stream. A canal ran through the town under streets and houses that had existed for ages. Some of the streets were so narrow that you might pass from one latticed window to its opposite neighbour in mid-air; and in truth the crumbling tenements were occasionally more picturesque than tempting. The house of Francis I., however, was an exception in its old and roomy courtyard, where vines then grew upon the walls. It was a vision of age and beauty, the embodiment of an artist's dream, carrying one back to the centuries when Francis I. sat upon the throne of his fathers, strengthened its power and encouraged art. The house still exists, but in a less perfect condition than at that period.

Here, as everywhere in France, Mrs. Wood felt at home. For long years the language had been as familiar to her as English; whilst her gentle manner appealed to the Celtic temperament, and rich and poor loved her. She admired them also, and, as we have said, possessed the faculty of all good and pure minds, of only thinking good of others. Though quietest of the quiet and calmest of the calm, she admired their vivacity, their life and verve, their gay temperament, the very gestures they could not speak without using.

Those were charming and memorable hours spent at Abbeville. The hotel was one of the oldest and most picturesque houses in the town, but has long since disappeared; and the host ushered Madame to a sitting-room fitted up with the taste of a past age, opening to a bedroom Louis XIV. might have furnished for His Majesty's own occupation. But the host apologised that for Monsieur there was nothing better to offer than a room in the *grenier*—comfortable, but high up and homely. The rooms not occupied at that moment were undergoing repair. There was only one other family in the house—the Comte de Marseine and Madame his mother—but they had taken nearly all the habitable apartments.

Here, indeed, was a strange coincidence, which for a moment rendered Mrs. Wood silent with surprise, then filled her with delight.

And so once more the old friends met in this singular manner, this out-of-the-world spot; and once again the world seemed smaller than it is. A delightful evening followed, in which the ladies were full of reminiscences of

the past. The reason for the de Marseines' present sojourn at Abbeville was that the old Comtesse de Marseine, Mrs. Wood's friend, had a sister living at a château in the neighbourhood—Madame St. Ange—and this sister, in failing health, had begged them to come to the old town for what would be to her probably a last visit.

"You see, chère enfant,"—Mrs. Wood smiled at the old familiar way of addressing her,—"the Château de St. Ange is only a league from the town; and, as I never could get on with the husband of Adelaïde, I felt that a frigid week spent under their roof would be too much for my nerves. So here we have installed ourselves; and we meet every day, and are excellent friends, he and I. I am not anxious about my sister. I think she has grown nervous about herself—she has had a trying life with her fidgety old husband, who calls her 'Madame,' and treats her with as much ceremony as if she were his queen instead of his wife, and is as cold as an icicle, and altogether fossilised. But as far as I can see, Adelaïde is in excellent health. She is my junior by three years, and I am only seventy-two. You know I was a de Kerkadé, one of the ancient families of Brittany—ancient, my dear, in every sense of the word, for we never think of dying under ninety, any one of us. Only my poor great-uncle died when he was seventy-four; killed when out boar-hunting: a judgment, some said, for boar-hunting at an age when he ought to have done with frivolities. But at seventy-four we are quite juvenile. My uncle killed his boar, and the head hangs up in the great hall of my old home—together with a good many other boars' heads—overlooking

our enchanting grounds and gardens, abounding in old-fashioned flowers, tall lilies and sweet-scented roses, and wonderful old wells decorated with ancient ironwork. Yes, Adelaïde has twenty good years before her. And I give you my word that I don't myself feel a day older than when I was forty years of age, and we used to sit, you and I, out upon the terraces, talking of the past and the future, and listening to the nightingales. This is something for a Frenchwoman to say —but then I am Bretonne."

"And you have not changed," remarked Mrs. Wood. "You do not look a day older than when we last met nine years ago."

"Nine years!" echoed Madame de Marseine. "Yes, it is indeed nine years, yet it seems only yesterday. Time flies. Before I can turn round my twenty years will have passed, and both Adelaïde and I will be no more. As for you, chère enfant, that lovely face is more lovely, more youthful than ever. If you live to be ninety, you will never grow old. And then your success! Who would have supposed this quiet person had so much in her! But I was sure there was much more behind those eyes than the world imagined, and you may remember that I told you so. I read your *East Lynne* in French first of all, translated by Mr. North Peat, who called it *Lady Isabel;* and then I read it in English. It is a pity that any great work has to be translated—the essence evaporates. And so you are going to Dieppe, to make there *la pluie et le beau temps.* Well, we will come and spend ten days also, for the sake of being with you. We have several friends there at this moment—charming people whom you must know."

It was a very pleasant incident, which made the visit to Abbeville more than memorable.

The *grenier* referred to proved delightful, high up and humble though it was. Admirable from an artistic point of view, with a lovely sixteenth-century dormer window and latticed panes, from which one looked out upon a wonderful assemblage of slanting ancient red and gray roofs, magnificent in tone, backed by the rich and picturesque towers of the church of St. Wolfram. And in the early morning it was worth a king's ransom to watch the breaking of dawn, and the wonderful light and colour spreading in an almost cloudless sky; the sun rising in splendour behind the church towers.

That morning was market-day, and Abbeville, for a quiet town, was full of sound and bustle. About six o'clock the factory people, men and women, hastened to their daily work; causing a small commotion, a crisp sound of many feet upon the pavements, many of them wearing sabots, which gave out a sharp sound like the falling of hail. The women wore white caps, which alone lifted them out of the realms of the commonplace. If they could only realise how much they have lost, would they return to their old ways? The people of Picardy have become very uninteresting; plain and rugged, with harsh shrill voices that seem laden with the coldness of their northern atmosphere. But on that bygone day everything was charming, old-world, and primitive; it was still the age of beauty and picturesqueness; streets and houses matched wonderfully with the people; not a shadow of the coming change had fallen.

The market-place was crowded with buyers and sellers.

Quite early in the morning ladies and servants had assembled with their baskets for the mid-week's purchases. Many of the market-women were decorated with gold chains and earrings, often really artistic—heirlooms handed down from mother to daughter, of which they were proud and careful as an old English baron of his pedigree. No offer would have persuaded one of them to part with her jewels, for they were a badge of the respectability of the wearer and the antiquity of her race. Everything was clean and tempting; butter, poultry, and vegetables; the latter arranged almost as one sees them in the far South and in Italy; a scene that charmed Mrs. Wood. She delighted in entering into conversation with some of the fresh, comely market-women decked out in their gold ornaments and caps. Romantic and interesting they looked in their way, these women of Abbeville, wives and daughters of the small farmers of the neighbourhood. As Mrs. Wood went through the market she was of course apostrophised by many an anxious seller of ducks, chickens and fresh Picardy produce. All reminded her of days gone by, when in her southern home, like all the ladies of the neighbourhood, she had accompanied her housekeeper to market, for the pleasure of seeing what was going on, and of being in touch with her tradespeople, and where, as old Venus had poetically expressed it, she came to them as a ray of sunshine. Only in such a country as France is such a state of things possible; and in leaving France this universally good understanding was a condition of life she much regretted.

Rarely, in her southern French home or elsewhere, had she gazed upon a more picturesque scene than this market-place

framed in by the quaint houses. Only the one charm was absent—they were all strangers to her. She could not inquire into the joys and sorrows of their simple and straightforward lives. No doubt all had their share of vicissitudes, but the tragic element was absent; few had skeletons in the cupboard. There is not a better, more quietly conducted class than the small farmers of France. Temperate and industrious, their simple annals are marked by seed-time and harvest, summer and winter. The men are peaceable, and have few vices; especially the sin of intemperance is rare. The women make good helpmates. As for the comely daughters of that Abbeville morning, they were only entering upon life; it would have been sad if as yet they knew much of its sorrows.

The whole town, we have said, was full of little old-world bits of architecture. Gabled houses with dormer windows and latticed panes, with red roofs beautiful with that rich tone that only age can give. Conspicuous in its beauty, rising splendidly above the quaint clusters of roofs, was the church of St. Wolfram, gaining so much by its unrestored condition—a church never finished, and destined to much greater magnificence by that Cardinal d'Amboise, who, three centuries ago, had something to do with many of the churches of France. Whatever may be thought or said of him, much of his work is a dream of beauty—and what more can be desired? Had the original designs been carried out, Abbeville would almost have rivalled Amiens—would indeed have surpassed it: and as Wren wept over his rejected St. Paul's, so it is said the architect wept over St. Wolfram's.

There is still much that is lovely about it, and much on

which Mrs. Wood gazed with true appreciation. The magnificent flamboyant façade; the beautiful Renaissance doors, three splendid portals richly decorated; the fine towers, conspicuous for many a mile round in the flat but fertile country; all the flowing tracery; the niches, still rich in old statues that survived the days of revolution and bloodshed; and the refined light buttresses which formed the charm of the otherwise disappointing interior.

By ten o'clock all had to be ended, for at ten the diligence started for Eu. The de Marseines accompanied Mrs. Wood to the starting-point. It was an extremely hot day, bright and sunny. There were no other passengers. According to French fashion, Madame de Marseine kissed Mrs. Wood on both cheeks —a process to which she patiently submitted. They had been great friends in the past, but even with her greatest friends Mrs. Wood was not demonstrative.

"You will lunch at Eu, chère enfant," said Madame de Marseine: "a quiet little place, with nothing to see. But at least there is the famous château. Go to it; ask for the head *gardien;* tell him that Madame de Marseine confides you to his care. The name will be a talisman. He will conduct you through it, and give you the history of every picture—every room in the place. *Ay di me!* I stayed there with my dear husband in 1843, as the guest of poor Louis Philippe. It was just after your Queen Victoria had visited him, and I remember his telling me how frank and charming and simple he had thought the young Queen of England, how handsome and noble and good her husband. Poor King! he enjoyed many a happy year in the Château d'Eu, which

he restored so magnificently after his mother's death; but in 1843 his own time was approaching; a few more years, and he was an exile. When I think of the beauty and grace of Marie Antoinette, in that first revolution of '93, —that wonderful head submitting to the scaffold; when I remember the last time I was with Marie Amélie, at Versailles, and the happy moments we spent in what had been Marie Antoinette's favourite Trianon—how it has all passed, how it all passes—we may well say that everything is vanity and vexation of spirit. It does not do to recall those times. I only wonder that we—friends of the King and Queen—Royalists—were spared a similar destiny. Revolutions are the horrors of history — institutions for the savage tribes of earth, but for none else. Chère enfant, the diligence grows impatient. We must part. Au revoir à Dieppe!"

"Et sans adieu," laughed young de Marseine—head of the family since his father had died seven years ago.

"À quinze jours d'ici," added his mother; "we shall meet again in a fortnight. I will write to-day to the hotel. You can even speak to the proprietor for me; one salon, five bedrooms—as near your own apartments as possible."

The "impatient diligence" waited to hear no more. With infinite cracking of whip and distressful rattling over the stones of Abbeville, the conveyance started on its way; the de Marseines watching and waving a final good-bye as it went out of sight.

The little incident was over, but had been singularly pleasant to Mrs. Wood, and she afterwards often alluded to it as one of those chances of travel to which we have referred. "You

tried to persuade me to cross by way of Newhaven," she laughed, as the diligence rattled through the quaint old town. "What a pleasure we should have lost if you had succeeded. But for meeting them here, the de Marseines would never have come to Dieppe."

"One must never try to persuade you again," was the reply; "with you 'whatever is, is right.' It is always so."

And in everything excepting time and trouble the present route was infinitely more agreeable, giving a variety of changes in a very short time, and taking the travellers through scenes that were then full of primitive interest and quiet charm.

ABBEVILLE.

CHAPTER XV

"So many worlds, so much to do,
So little done, such things to be,
How know I what had need of thee,
For thou wert strong as thou wert true?"

HOUSE OF FRANCIS I.

THE surrounding country, as we have said, was flat, but rich and fertile. The diligence passed through long, straight roads, such as France loves; but the stiff poplars so often found by the wayside were absent. In place there were green hedgerows, which made, and still make, the scenery of Picardy and Normandy very English: smiling and luxuriant. Field after field, league after league, a succession of pastures,

cultivated lands, and orchards laden with the small cider-apple.

At last the small, sleepy town of Eu loomed in the distance, and soon the diligence came to a stand stillin the centre of its irregular market-place, with little to recommend it beyond its primitive life. The diligence was the event of the day. No one ever came to remain here, but people arrived on their way to Tréport, the small neighbouring sea-side resort.

Here at Eu occurred another singular coincidence, of which life is so full. No sooner had the diligence stopped than a small group of people, unmistakably English, wended their way across the small square, came up to it, and accosted the *conducteur* and the travellers.

"We have come to meet Mrs. Wood," said the senior lady of the party—"Mrs. Wood and her son. I do not see them here."

"I am Mrs. Wood," was the surprised answer, "and I am accompanied by my son; but it is impossible that any one could be here to meet us. No one knows of our being at Eu."

"It is very strange," returned the leader in aggrieved tones, looking at the travellers as though they had transformed themselves into other people, as they do in fairy tales. "I never knew anything so extraordinary. Not once in six months do any English arrive by the diligence—we are living over here and ought to know. Yesterday we received a letter from General Paling asking us to be sure to go to the diligence to-day and meet Mrs. Wood and her son; we do so; Mrs.

Wood and her son arrive, but it is not *the* Mrs. Wood and her son."

"It cannot be," laughed Mrs. Henry Wood, "I am not acquainted with General Paling, and therefore he could not have written to any one about us. It is certainly singular, but can only be a coincidence."

Upon which the strangers bowed and withdrew with injured expressions. They evidently felt a great wrong had been done to them; it was clearly a subject for a grievance. Finally they disappeared across the Place in earnest conversation, every now and then looking back reproachfully at the innocent diligence.

At Eu the travellers had some hours to wait. In a small salon of the hotel, only a degree removed from a restaurant, a simple *déjeuner* was served. Pewter spoons were all that could be produced for the soup, and two-pronged forks for the modest *bouilli.* But the coffee was excellent—it always was so in those days; *now* it is rather the exception; you must go farther north for it, to the shores of Sweden and Norway. But if the pewter spoons at Eu were primitive, the coffee was served in pure white china, for once delicately thin. That which redeemed the hotel was the woman who waited in a picturesque Normandy costume—for she came from the neighbourhood of Rouen, and was proprietress of the establishment. She, too, was decked out with heavy gold ornaments, evidently hastily put on in honour of Madame.

A short walk after *déjeuner*, and the château was reached. Those were the days of Napoleon III., to whom it then belonged. Later the French Republic, by a graceful act of

justice, restored it to the Comte de Paris. It stood in its well-kept park: a low building of red brick with slate roofs, bearing unmistakable traces of sixteenth-century architecture, contrasting well with the green of the magnificent timber. Here had once stood a castle in which the ill-fated Harold had visited William of Normandy, so long ago that only to think of it was like looking back upon another and a far-off world. The ground was sacred to history.

On asking for the *gardien* a venerable old man presented himself, who must long since have been added to his forefathers. The name of Madame de Marseine acted as a talisman, as she had foretold. With a low bow, worthy of the court of Louis Philippe, he placed himself at Madame's disposal and was her humble servitor. He would do the honours of the château; it was too great a privilege to attend upon any friend of Madame la Comtesse.

Royally he did his duty. Here had sat Marie Amélie; there she had written her letters. Here, on this very floor, in the days of his great-uncle, Marie Antoinette had danced the *minuet de la cour*—most beautiful and graceful of assembled ladies. His uncle had told him how he had seen the King's eyes light up with admiration as he watched the popularity of the Queen, though demonstrativeness was not a characteristic of Louis XVI. In that cabinet, Louis Philippe had transacted many of his state affairs, and passed many an anxious hour when the evil days were drawing near. For his part he thought that with more discretion and better counsel the Revolution of 1848 might have been avoided, and the King and Queen have ended their days comfortably in their own

palace instead of in a foreign land. It was not for him to say, but the humblest man could not close his eyes if nature had given him a little intelligence. And he had been so great a favourite with the King and Queen, so much about their persons, that naturally what little was good and intelligent about him had come to the surface.

And so he went on, as he led the way through apartments resplendent with gilding, and corridors hung with portraits. Many a small anecdote of the King and Queen he narrated—trifling circumstances, which gained their interest from the delicate romance and sadness which must ever surround all exiled monarchs.

On leaving, the *douceur* he would not have been above accepting on ordinary occasions was modestly declined. "Monsieur," he said, with deprecation, as if fearing to offend, "it is already too much honour to escort any friends of the Comtesse de Marseine, so great a friend of my King and Queen, and from whom I have received in days gone by many marks of favour. I beg Monsieur's pardon, if he allows me to retain of this visit the only recollection that can gratify me: that of having once more rendered Madame de Marseine a small service, and of doing it for the love of the days that are gone. I shall not have many more occasions."

Quite a graceful little speech, delivered in a manner worthy of a courtier—from the heart, too, for there were tears in the old man's eyes as he escorted the travellers to the gates of the park and bowed them away with as much ceremony as if on either side he saw the melancholy shades of Louis Philippe and Marie Amélie smiling approval.

It had been a memorable little visit. The old *gardien* had contrived to bring into it quite a royal and historical interest. An unwritten page in the past had been recorded; the figures of Louis Philippe and Marie Amélie had stood out clearly; for a moment he had brought them back to life; one had almost heard their tones and footsteps in passing through the rooms once haunted by them: where, twenty years before, they might still have been found with the first shadows upon their faces of approaching evil.

The scene changed to Tréport, with its broad expanse of sea quietly breaking upon a flat, shingly shore; the most quaint and curious and confined little place ever seen, and the most absolutely French. In those days it consisted of a few houses little better than bungalows, thrown, as it were, without plan or sequence upon a small, out-of-the-way corner of the earth, which might also be called the very ends of the world. It has now a harbour, a casino, fashionable hotels, and a town of some 4000 or 5000 inhabitants; but it can never be otherwise than contracted; crowded with gay and chattering Parisians, who come here, year after year, for sea-bathing and flirting, and *le grand air*.

Few English were ever seen there, and it was not surprising that Mrs. Wood should attract attention as she walked upon the Plage, charmed with the sea, in which she ever delighted, charmed with the movement and animation around her. Children were playing their seaside games; mothers, nurses, grown-up brothers—all were in evidence, and in the full tide of enjoyment. Remarks were freely offered and easily overheard, much to her quiet amusement.

Recognising her as English, they possibly took it for granted, as people will do, that French was not understood. Many years have passed since then, but not the smallest incident of this journey is forgotten.

"A new arrival!"

"And English too!"

"Is it possible that Tréport is becoming known, and the English are going to invade us—coming over to criticise, with their superior airs of morality?"

"Ma chère, one swallow does not make a summer. Don't be unnecessarily alarmed. These new arrivals may be only birds of passage—visitors of an hour, for all we know."

"Who can she be?"

"Probably an English lady visiting in the neighbourhood. Perhaps the Château d'Eu. But no; no one is there at present. It is in possession of the *gardiens* and the spiders, and they have an easy time of it."

"Her companion bears just sufficient resemblance to see that they are related—probably a younger brother."

It was ever so; Mrs. Wood possessed the secret of perpetual youth. Some years before the above incident she was crossing over to England, when a lady sat down beside her on the deck and entered into conversation.

"I was speaking just now to your two brothers," she remarked; "asking them——"

"My two brothers?" interrupted Mrs. Wood questioningly.

"Yes, those two gentlemen standing at the other end there."

"The one is my husband, the other my eldest son," laughed

Mrs. Wood. The son in question was then a lad of seventeen, her husband was forty years of age: in those days as young-looking as herself.

But years had rolled on since that crossing. The youthful-looking husband was no more, and Mrs. Wood had passed through much tribulation. At the time of her husband's death she was writing "Oswald Cray." Appearing in *Good Words* month by month, the monthly portion had to be sent in, in spite of all; work could not be laid aside, however great the strain. She bravely kept up to the last page, and then the overwrought nerves broke down.

"I can do nothing," she said to her doctor in some alarm. "I cannot sleep. I cannot read. It seems too much even to look at a letter. What does it mean?"

"It means, my dear lady, that you have overtaxed your powers," returned the doctor. "You have gone through a time of great emotion, which alone was sufficient mental strain. In addition to this you have worked, and now that your work is done and the strain is over, your nerves have given way."

"Do you think I shall recover?" she asked, in some anxiety.

"Yes, if you follow my directions. The mischief is functional, not organic. You must take four months' rest; neither look at a book nor read a paper, nor think of a plot or a novel. Leave your present surroundings. Go over to your beloved France, where I have heard you say you feel so much at home. The life and movement there is exactly what you require. You love the water; sit in front of it and watch it

day after day. Nothing in the world is so soothing to nerves and brain as to watch that ever-changing sea. In short, for the next four months, as far as all intellectual pursuits are concerned, you must live the life of a vegetable."

Mrs. Wood laughed. "It is a severe remedy," she said, "and will be difficult to carry out. But if it is necessary, it shall be done; and I feel that it *is* necessary."

The result proved the wisdom of the advice. Mrs. Wood left home, and for four months England knew her no more. "The life of a vegetable" was adopted; books, letters, papers, everything that could tax the brain put aside. At the end of that time she returned to England with health restored.

And now, on this day when Tréport was visited, she was once more on her way to Dieppe, which had become her favourite watering-place. The scraps of conversation had afforded much amusement as they were caught, and much more was said that need not be recorded. The English lady who had caused some temporary commotion in the little world of Tréport quickly disappeared, and was seen no more. The Plage and its little crowd no doubt resumed their normal condition.

Meanwhile Mrs. Wood had returned to Eu, where the diligence, still in the shape of a two-horse omnibus, was preparing for the journey to Dieppe. Again they were the only travellers. Mrs. Wood, ever considerate to others, first entered the hotel to say "Bon jour" to Madame.

La Patrone, who combined the sincerity of the Norman with a dash of French fervour, was charmed at the little mark of attention.

"To the pleasure of seeing Madame again," she cried.

"I would that my small hotel had the honour of receiving Madame for a longer séjour; I should have the distinction of waiting upon her myself. I regret that of all days in the year my husband is not at home to assure Madame that he would devote his energies to her comfort. He has gone to Lille upon a small matter of business. It may interest Madame to know that we have a propriété there; small and humble, it is true, but a family possession. We had let it to people apparently of integrity; but they have gone off and never paid their rent, and we hear that the place is in disorder. My husband has gone to see to it. He is good and easy with people, but this time he is furious, and the law will soon find out where these malfaiteurs have escaped to. Only, as Madame knows, you cannot draw water from a dry well, and I fear we shall do no good by going after them. Voilà l'omnibus!"

For the little domestic episode had been given during the passage from the hotel to the diligence, under Madame's polite escort. The narration bore witness to Mrs. Wood's immediate influence upon people—the more remarkable that she never sought or invited confidences, and in manner with strangers was quiet almost to reticence.

La Patrone was resplendent in gold chain and earrings and picturesque Norman cap, bodice and petticoat—garments not assumed every day, she declared. She had been a very handsome woman, as so many of the Normans are, with fine heads well set upon their shoulders, magnificent figures, and a carriage upright as a dart—the heritage of a long line of ancestors, humble though they may be.

Such was the hostess of Eu; but she had long passed her youth, and indeed talked of retiring to the little propriété in Lille which had been so cavalierly treated by the missing tenants. They could just live upon their rentes, she said; and after all it was no use slaving until you dropped into the grave, where you certainly could enjoy nothing. There were no children, and no one to put by for—only themselves to think about. She longed to leave sleepy Eu, with its ugly Place, no two sides alike, where the only distraction was change of weather and the daily diligence. In Lille there was always something going on; and they had relations there—sisters and cousins of her husband. She herself had originally come from Duclair, a pretty village not far from Rouen, on the road to Caudebec and Hâvre, with its fine old church, wonderful marble pillars, and dragon mouths which supported the roof. Perhaps Madame knew Caudebec too, with its mascaret—that great wave which came twice a year, in March and October, and which people foretold just as astronomers foretold eclipses of the sun and moon. It was wonderful. On a given day excursionists would arrive, take their standing on the Plage, and all at once, as sure as the sky above them, the enormous wave came rolling in. Who knew whether, some fine day, it would not be so enormous as to drown them all?

The omnibus was ready to start. The coachman was mounting his box; the whip sent off its fireworks.

"Jean le cocher," cried la Patrone, "have a care to Madame in the interior. Don't drive too fast, and avoid the big stones on the road. They are so reckless," she explained, "and sometimes drive furiously, especially if they

have had a glass or two of absinthe before starting, or get it en route. Au plaisir, Madame," as the reckless Jean whipped up his horses, and began to rattle over the stones of the little square. "If Madame will only descend here for a few days on her return from Dieppe, I shall be proud to wait upon her."

And with her best bow, and looking a very picturesque member of society, la Patrone stood watching the diligence, straight and motionless as another Joan of Arc at the stake, until it turned the corner and was seen no more. But the result of the visit to Lille was never known, for the "few days' descent" at Eu never took place. As women rule the world, it is probable that la Patrone had her way, and they retired to their little propriété, finding happiness in a life of leisure, and escaping the dangers of uncertain tenants.

ANNECY.

CHAPTER XVI

"So, dearest, now thy brows are cold,
I see thee what thou art, and know
Thy likeness to the wise below,
Thy kindred with the great of old."

HOUSE OF FRANCIS I.

THE journey to Dieppe was much the same as the first part of the journey from Abbeville, excepting that it appeared somewhat longer and more tedious. The scenery was still flat and unvarying, and grew a little monotonous; long straight roads that seemed interminable; whilst the dust under the horses' feet flew in endless white clouds.

The omnibus had not gone very far before it stopped, and

a picturesque nun entered and took her seat quietly. She glanced at Mrs. Wood, and then, with a graceful inclination and a "Bon jour, Madame," threw back her black veil, which must have been trying in the heat of the day. In spite of the placid face, one seemed to read sorrow and disappointment in its expression. In youth she must have been beautiful.

Presently, with another glance at her fellow-traveller, she spoke again.

"Madame est Anglaise," she said, more as an assertion than a question. Her voice was soft and pleasant, her French such as the upper classes spoke; she was evidently of gentle birth. Her age, as far as could be guessed, was about fifty. "It is not often that English ladies are seen in the uncomfortable Dieppe diligence," she continued; "and to-day to make it still more uncomfortable we have only the omnibus."

"We crossed over to Boulogne," explained Mrs. Wood, "and intended to go round by St. Valery-sur-Somme, but there is no longer any correspondence."

"They are always changing their plans," remarked the nun, "and not always for the better. Madame has come round by Abbeville, where she must have stayed the night. It may chance that Madame is acquainted with Madame de St. Ange?"

"No," returned Mrs. Wood, smiling, and preparing for another coincidence; "I never met Madame de St. Ange; but her sister, Madame de Marseine, is my great friend. We spent the evening together yesterday."

"How singular that we should meet, you and I, Madame,

and in a public conveyance, and in this remote spot!" cried the nun, with more enthusiasm than she had probably shown for many a day. "Of course I know Madame de Marseine as well as I know Madame de St. Ange; but I have seen more of the latter, having passed much of my life in the same neighbourhood. We are related; their father and mine were first cousins."

"Yet you seem much younger than they," remarked Mrs. Wood.

"I am younger, but not so much so as you might imagine," laughed the nun; for nuns laugh sometimes. "I know that I look about fifty, but I am really sixty-two. Our quiet life, in which the emotions are suppressed and the days run calmly as a river, keeps the lines out of our faces."

Then, after a few moments' pause and a keen glance at Mrs. Wood, she added:

"I am sure you must be Madame Wood, of whom I have heard Madame de Marseine so often speak. Yet you also puzzle me, for you look only about thirty, and Madame Wood must be much more."

"I am Madame Wood, and I am quite fifty," was the laughing reply; "yet I am not a nun, and have had my share of sorrow. I too have heard of you from Madame de Marseine; I am sure you must be Sœur Marie-Blanche."

"I am indeed that most unfortunate personage," returned the nun sadly. "But this is one of the unexpected pleasures of my life. I have so long wanted to know you. You have bewitched Madame de Marseine, and we never meet but she talks of you. Of late years it has been to bewail your broken

intercourse. I have also heard much of you from your cousin, Sœur Marie-Ursule, who is a nun of the Visitation. I do not belong to that order, but have sometimes stayed a week at a time in her convent. What a charming voice she had, what a wonderful harpist, and how truly good a woman. Her placid face bears the expression of a saint. She was a Miss Osborne, I think, in the old days."

"Yes. She belonged to the Osbornes of Chelsley. They were Roman Catholics, as you may know. She was beautiful and accomplished, and was to have married in early life, but she had no dowry, and somehow it came to nothing. In her disappointment—I believe it really broke her heart—she took the veil and became a cloistered nun of that very strict order; her beauty, accomplishments, goodness, all lost to the world. Do you know that she has never even seen a train, or any modern improvement?"

"Yet I do not pity her," returned Sœur Marie-Blanche, "for she has never repented the step. She has been happy in her life. She found her vocation; whilst I——"

She paused. Mrs. Wood looked at her with sympathy. It was one of those life-histories in which she was ever interested. She did not speak, but waited for more.

"Well I have *not* been happy," laughed Sœur Marie-Blanche. "As Marie-Ursule found her vocation, so I missed mine. As Marie de Kerkadé I was to have married the Baron de Keruen —the head of a Breton family. We were much attached to each other—it was really a marriage d'amour, not merely de convenance. Everything was arranged, the wedding-day fixed. Three days before the event he went out shooting—and

was brought home dead. Inconsolable, I seemed to lose all interest in life. My mother, a great dévote, had often expressed a wish that I should take the veil—a singular and unhealthy wish, as I look upon it, for of all vocations it should never be forced upon any one. Again she proposed it, and I, not caring in my sorrow what became of me, yielded. I was to have become a cloistered nun, but it was soon seen that it would never do for me. I could never have borne the restraint and confinement. It would have driven me mad or killed me; at the very least have uprooted what little good might be in me. My headquarters, as I may call them, are near Abbeville—my convent; but I go about the world on all sorts of missions: sometimes nursing the sick; sometimes on important business connected with our order. They look upon me as a female diplomatist. I must be actively engaged, and my happiest times are when I have most to do. Not infrequently I spend a whole week with my cousin, Madame de St. Ange, and so have kept up my interest with the world. I am really only half a nun, for I am allowed far more freedom than is often given to those buried women. My family, as you know, has great influence in certain quarters, and it is supposed that I have great influence with *them.* Now, the Osbornes were Roman Catholic; but you, chère Madame——"

"Am a Protestant," quickly responded Mrs. Wood. "I have lived amongst Roman Catholics, some of my best friends are Roman Catholic, and some of my relatives; but I am a Protestant, and hope to die in the faith of my fathers."

"You are quite right," replied Sœur Marie-Blanche. "Though I should not dare to say it aloud—it would almost

mean excommunication—I would not lift a finger to make a convert. I would have the world more large-minded, and let each keep to his faith—so long as the foundations of that faith are the same. We go to the same Fountain-head: let that suffice. But we must not enter upon a religious argument in a public conveyance. It might stop and admit some bigoted priest, who would report me and bring upon me all sorts of trouble and penances. Besides, I firmly believe that the birds of the air carry tales. I have opened my heart to you," she smiled; "but though we have only just met, I seem to have known you long. You are of those who inspire confidence. Madame de Marseine has told me so many a time; now I judge for myself. I did not know she was at Abbeville, though I knew she would probably go there. I have just come from Blangy, where I have had some work to do: Blangy with its ruins of St. Berthe as sole attraction for the explorer. Madame de St. Ange has fallen into the nervous condition which sometimes attacks elderly people: she is always thinking that she is going to die. Of course the inevitable must come to all some time. She is not strong and needs sympathy. Unfortunately her frigid husband does not understand even the meaning of the virtue, though an excellent man in his way. Madame de Marseine, I need not tell you, is brimming over with it."

"And are you now bound for Dieppe?" asked Mrs. Wood.

"Yes, truly. I have an important mission to perform there, which will take me quite a fortnight. So I trust we may often meet, that I may know you better. It will be a mutual topic of conversation with Madame de Marseine in days to come. I can go about as I please; shall even be able to join you for

an hour or two every day at the casino, if I do not make myself too conspicuous. Levity and frivolity are forbidden," she laughed, "but I may mix a little with the world. Du reste, levity never attracted me; life is too serious, and mine especially has been all sadness and sorrow—the sadness and sorrow of being constantly haunted with what might have been. But at sixty-two the most frivolous coquette would surely have become earnest and sober."

So talking, the afternoon passed into evening, the shades of night fell, and it was almost dark when Dieppe was reached.

"You go to the hotel," said Sœur Marie-Blanche, as the omnibus entered the narrow rattling streets of the old town; "I to the convent. But what a benediction that I may come and go as I please!"

"Will you be allowed sometimes to spend an evening with us?" asked Mrs. Wood.

"Oh yes, provided I am in by ten o'clock. There are of course certain rules and conditions that I must observe, and that is one of them."

"You will see Madame de Marseine, I hope, who has promised to spend ten days here; but it will be a week before she arrives. Then she returns to Abbeville for a final week with Madame de St. Ange."

"That is delightful!" cried Sœur Marie-Blanche. "We shall be a lively family party—for you are quite one of ourselves. What pleasant days and evenings shall we have! I must discover complications in my mission that will take time to overcome. What kindly fate led to our meeting in this way? I was to have come yesterday, but an intense headache

prevented my travelling. I murmured at the time, and lo, it has proved my good friend."

The rattling streets made conversation difficult. Jean le cocher—who, to give him his due, had not once during the journey descended from his box for absinthe—awoke the echoes with his whip; a small pandemonium. People of course rushed out to see the cavalcade pass.

"I do not like Dieppe," said Sœur Marie-Blanche. "It is unwholesome and monotonous."

"But the Plage is fine and the sea magnificent," observed Mrs. Wood; "without any monotony."

"Ah no! There you are in another world, and those who are fortunate enough to put up at any of the hotels on the Plage have nothing to complain of. But I, attached to the convent, am not so well placed. Those gloomy walls are depressing, and the stereotyped life would soon kill me if I could not get away from it. I always depart with joy; but on this occasion, if I leave you and Marguerite de Marseine behind me, I shall become a Niobe!"

Mrs. Wood laughed. "Do not think of that last day," she observed. "Rather dwell upon the days we shall spend together. We must both write to Madame de Marseine, and try to hasten her coming. Yet no; for we must think of poor Madame de St. Ange!"

"Poor Adelaïde!" sighed Sœur Marie-Blanche. "I have not been happy out of the world—she has not been happy within it. I suppose happiness does not exist. The fate I missed my imagination has always clothed in couleur de rose; I have pictured my life one long summer's day, a calm flowing

stream, all sparkling sunshine and clear reflections: but I dare-say I should have had many rapids and shallows, many a thorn-wound."

"When the end comes, depend upon it you will see that all has been for the best," said Mrs. Wood earnestly.

"I am quite certain of it," returned Sœur Marie-Blanche. "Yet it is hard to think so sometimes. The human heart is deceitful; what we have missed, what might have been, we see for ever in rainbow colours, whilst the skies of our actual life are always gray. But there is a happy fortnight before me," she cried more joyously. "Events are not always so kindly disposed. I will make the most of it."

And so the friends—already friends—parted; to meet again on many succeeding days. And when Madame de Marseine arrived, with all her train, Sœur Marie-Blanche seemed to have obtained a special dispensation or indulgence, for she spent almost all her hours with them. Dieppe was at that time the most fashionable of French watering-places, where the beau-monde from Paris and elsewhere met for many weeks of a delightful and unceremonious life. Picnics, walks upon the heights, parties of pleasure to the Château d'Arques, ambassadors' balls, hours spent amidst friendly groups watching from the raised terrace of the Casino the deep blue, ever-changing sea—all contributed to the gilding of the hours as Time took his flight. In few places is the sea more beautiful than at Dieppe, more blue and expansive. Every hour of the day possessed its own phases and changes; the sun passing grandly and gorgeously on its way touched the sparkling waters into life; the sunsets, night after night, were celestial visions; and

many a vessel steering westward seemed to be making straight for the land from which there is no return. To Mrs. Henry Wood it was a time of great happiness: renewing her intimacy with old friends; reviving old associations; the air full of the sound of the French tongue; the streets all life and movement, evidences of the happy French temperament which persists in seeing a silver lining to every cloud.

The episode has been specially dwelt on, as affording another insight into much of Mrs. Henry Wood's life: the scenes she passed through, and day by day grew familiar with, until France became as another home to her, and its inhabitants, in whom, we would repeat, she ever saw much that was good, a greatly-loved people.

LAC DU BOURGET.

PART II

CHAPTER XVII

"But there is more than I can see,
And what I see I leave unsaid,
Nor speak it, knowing Death has made
His darkness beautiful with thee."

NEAR ABBEVILLE.

IF the Abbeville episode be excepted, we have hitherto dwelt chiefly upon the scenes of Mrs. Henry Wood's childhood, youth, and early married life.

The narrative is again taken up after a lapse of many years. The scene changes to England; the order of the old life had altered in every possible way; romance had given place to realities. The interval

was a period of many trials and troubles, which proved Mrs. Wood's true nature and heroic endurance.

We have now to touch upon her literary career. We feel how delicate is the task, and with regard to her success we would, as far as possible, record the words and praises of others and nothing of our own.

For the rest, praise at this hour could neither add to nor take from her fame. To one whose works, in the words of Mr. Bentley, have sold only less, if less, than those of Scott and Dickens, mere praise or the contrary can avail little.

When Mrs. Henry Wood began to write *East Lynne*, France had ceased to be the home of herself and her husband. They had come to England, and were staying temporarily in a furnished house at Upper Norwood, where the air was supposed to be specially suited to Mrs. Wood's sensitive organisation.

The Norwood of that time was very different from the Norwood of to-day. Then it was a charming suburb, with nothing unsightly about it but the huge Crystal Palace, still in the freshness of youth. The place itself, apart from the triangular village which had long existed, consisted of a few scattered houses. The air was wonderfully pure and fresh. Rural walks abounded; country lanes and hedges; extensive views from the heights over several counties of England. Cattle grazed peacefully in the fields, and on roads near at hand one frequently met with all the sights and sounds of a farmyard. All this has changed.

In spite of the air, Mrs. Wood's health became seriously affected. Mysterious illness baffled the skill of the wisest

doctors. For eighteen months she suffered so severely that at length life seemed threatened. At one time she herself had quite given up hope, and perhaps her patience and faith had never been more keenly tried.

The paroxysms were peculiar. The first day severe hot and cold shivering fits and inability to rise from her bed; the second day intense agony in the region of the liver; the third day freedom from pain—the invalid able to leave her room, but with the complexion of an orange; the fourth day she would be and would look perfectly well—hope revived; the fifth day the series of symptoms would begin again, and steadily run their course.

So it went on for eighteen months without variation. The sufferer grew painfully weak and thin; she never went out without wearing a thick veil, and a very short walk exhausted her. At length to expect recovery seemed almost hoping against hope. Dr. Hetley of Norwood constantly attended but failed to cure her; yet his view of the case from the commencement differed from that of other doctors, and proved correct.

During this trying period many remedies were adopted, many doctors consulted, without effect. Change of air was suggested, and many parts of England were visited: amongst other places, Worcester and Malvern—Malvern which in days gone by she had so much disliked. But it was thought possible that her native air might possess healing virtues beyond other places.

Whilst here she wrote two letters upon the subject of her illness to one of her children, a boy visiting in Leicestershire.

The letters have long since been destroyed, but every word remains in the memory. They were simple letters, but the one came laden with happiness, the other with despair.

"I have good news for you," the first began. "My illness seems to have taken a turn at last; the usual paroxysm has not come; for three days I have felt perfectly well. How thankful I shall be if this really proves the turning-point, and I recover health and strength. I had really begun to lose hope. No one knows what the suffering has been. . . . How do you like Leicestershire?" the letter presently continued. "Your grandmother used to visit the Carews many years ago: perhaps was given the very guest-chamber you are now occupying; but to her the charm of the place consisted in its society: the tame monotony of the surrounding country wearied and depressed her. I think I should feel the same."

This good news was soon to be contradicted. A few days passed, and then came a second letter.

"I think I must never again speak of myself or my illness," it said. "The very day after I last wrote to you another attack came on, more intense, I think, than usual; as though it had only gathered strength by delay. I need not say that I feel depressed. It seems all the harder and more painful for the short respite, the hope which had begun to revive in me. Shall I ever recover? I begin to question it. I think you should also accustom yourself to look at it from this point of view—the possibility of a day coming when you will have to do without me. The thought that I may have to leave you is inexpressibly painful; but you must remember there is One who cannot err; all must be for the best, however dark and

mysterious it may seem. If it is well that I should recover, I know that I shall do so. Let us rest upon this thought as long as hope remains."

This second letter was a great blow. There had been three days of hope and high spirits, the bright surrounding life fully entered into, the society of a large and charming household thoroughly appreciated. But again the sunshine was withdrawn. And still the illness went on, and the attacks continued with the regularity of day and night. Mrs. Wood returned to Norwood apparently no better than she had left it some months before.

It would be impossible to forget the evening of her home-coming after the first long separation life had known. A flood of sunshine seemed to have entered the house; everything was changed and beautified. As she sat in her easy-chair, talking in her calm sweet voice, her soft dark eyes haunting one with their sad expression, she resembled more a beautiful shadow than a human being.

Was it to become a reality? It almost appeared so, for she seemed to belong more to heaven than to earth. It was difficult to hope. Her absence had been prolonged, famous doctors had prescribed, yet she appeared only the worse. Amongst others, her friend the celebrated Henry Carden of Worcester—whom she was fond of occasionally bringing into her Johnny Ludlow stories—had her for some time under his care; but for once the great surgeon was at fault. His very anxiety perhaps interfered with his skill. He took a wrong view of her case. As we have said, Dr. Hetley was the only one whose opinion was correct, and even

his was rather negative than positive: he could tell what it was not; he could not be sure what it was.

She spoke a little of herself that first night. "Everything appears useless," she said. "The doctors can do nothing. I only seem worse after every fresh advice. It is certain that my strength cannot hold out much longer. I am worn to a shadow."

But a brighter day was at hand. There were still many years of life for Mrs. Henry Wood—years of earnest labour, for not one of her works had yet appeared. "Man's extremity is God's opportunity," and in the present instance the saying may truly be quoted. All human aid had been tried in vain.

One day she came down looking calm and resigned, but very sad. She was asked if she felt less well than usual. No; but she had less hope. She had taken up one of her husband's medical books—it was Dr. Hooper's *Vade Mecum*—and lighted upon a malady which exactly described her case. In her own mind there was no doubt about it. "This disease is incurable and ends in death," said the book. All hope seemed over.

Her husband gently remonstrated with her for referring to medical works in her present state, declaring that many in perfect health might read such a book at any moment and fancy themselves suffering from every complaint. The remark brought no consolation. She pointed out that the fatal description answered to every symptom of her malady, and when her doctor called that afternoon she told him what she had found, and her conviction. "You must have known this," she remarked, "and have kept it from me in mistaken kindness."

Dr. Hetley looked grave, and felt he should have some

trouble to restore confidence. "It is a mistake to take up these books," he said. "You may do yourself great harm. Fancy goes far with us in our illnesses for good or evil. Faith heals as much as in days of old. Mr. Wood must keep his books under lock and key; they are only for such men as he and I, who can go to the root of these matters. You must promise me never to meddle with them again." Then he pointed out how and where she was mistaken. The malady alluded to was not hers. Of certain symptoms which must accompany it she had none. He admitted that her illness perplexed him. "Not," he added, "that I think I don't understand it, but because it refuses to yield to remedies. I have tried everything I can think of, and can do no more. At the same time I see no reason why you should not recover."

So far this was consoling; but it remained a time of sadness, sorrow and anxiety. Month after month hope and despair fought with each other. In this manner a year and a half passed away. It seemed that the end could not be far off. And it was during this time, between the paroxysms of illness, life looking sad and dark, that *East Lynne* was written. The author often wondered whether she should live to finish it. Yet through all she was resigned and cheerful, dreading the worst for the sake of others far more than for her own sake; feeling also, no doubt, that if she died, her gift would remain unknown, her song unsung.

All this was sufficient to overwhelm any spirit less sure of itself, less dependent upon a higher Power. Yet her work at this time has no touch of morbidness: it is healthy and vigorous; if it has its pathos, it has also its humour.

So she sat with hands folded, reduced to the utmost, waiting, wondering what was next to be done. Her doctor had plainly said he could do no more. She had been brought into a narrow way, and there seemed no turning to right or left—nothing but the dark road leading to the end.

Help came unexpectedly in the form of an old woman, who declared she would cure if permitted. It seemed absurd to suppose that where much medical skill had failed an old dame should succeed. Desperate diseases require desperate remedies, it has been said, but in this instance the exception proved the rule. The remedy suggested was simplicity itself.

This old dame one day called, asked to see Mrs. Wood, and was admitted. She wore a poke bonnet and gray shawl, and carried a large umbrella. Dropping a curtsey, she sat down, leaning both hands on her Gamp-like weapon. Her manner of talking was direct and decided. We will call her Davey.

"Ma'am," said Mrs. Davey, "I have heard of your illness, I see and know what's the matter with you, and I can cure you if allowed to do so."

There was confidence in the very tones of the old woman. She evidently believed herself and her remedy infallible. It may at once be stated that she was influenced by the sole wish to do good; she desired no reward, would accept none.

As time went on, she proved a very exceptional woman in her way; gifted with sense and penetration. A broad forehead, full at the temples, distinguished her; keen gray eyes that glittered, and a square, expressive jaw denoting force of character: a hard, stern face, but very vigorous. A strength

of will that kept her alive to a very advanced age, after Mrs. Wood herself had passed away, though many years her senior.

The statement so boldly put forward was not more startling than the way in which it was delivered; the singular figure, with its earnest face, leaning forward impressively upon her umbrella; the fingers of her gloves long drawn out, and looking like the claws of a bird; the strong, powerful features; the bushy eyebrows, beneath which the keen eyes looked out upon the world, allowing nothing to escape them—all helped to make her appear like an old seer or prophetess of the world gone by rather than a nineteenth-century woman.

"Do you know," said Mrs. Wood, "that you are undertaking to succeed where many doctors have failed? I have had every advice, and neither doctors, medicine, nor change of air have had any effect upon me."

"Then, ma'am, that is something like the case of the woman we read of in the Bible who spent all her substance upon physicians, yet was none the better. It is often so in these days. I have no great respect for the Faculty, as they call themselves. Many an old medicine woman with her herbs and simples can do more—not that I deal in herbs or simples either. The moment a case is a little out of common they are all at sea, not curing the ill but often increasing it by experiments. They are all very well for cutting off limbs, or watching a fever; but they cannot see below the surface and in puzzling cases only guess at what is wrong. More often than not they make a mistake."

"And how do you profess to be wiser than they?"

"I don't know, ma'am; it was born with me. It is not education, for I never had any: as much as I can do to sign my name and read my Bible. The more I think about things, the more I seem to understand them. Perhaps I was intended for a man and a doctor, and Nature made a mistake in forming me a woman. Nature makes mistakes sometimes, just as men make them generally. Many a woman would rule and govern well, whilst many of our idle men are no better than weak old women. That has been my experience in life."

Poor Mrs. Davey, it was discovered, had not to stray far from home for an example.

"I don't think that is the fault of Nature," returned Mrs. Wood, smiling at Mrs. Davey's forcible language, to which a strong north-country accent gave additional colouring. "Nature never makes mistakes; it is weak wills and infirm purposes that are to blame—bad qualities whether in men or women. And now tell me what you propose to do."

"Ay, ma'am, that is the point. You'll excuse the liberty I have taken; but I seldom have an opportunity of speaking a word. People about me in my own class don't understand me, and I have to think my thoughts and keep them to myself."

Then this singular woman proceeded to state her case and give her reasons. The advice was so harmless it seemed the height of credulity to act upon it; impossible that it could touch an illness which had lasted eighteen months and had resisted much skill and thought. Mrs. Wood naturally expressed her doubt.

"Ma'am," returned Mrs. Davey, "do you remember the case

of Naaman and his illness? How he went to the prophet and expected that he would be bidden do some great thing, or that the prophet would come down and lay hands on him with great ceremony? How he turned away offended, because to wash seven times in Jordan was beneath his dignity? It was a miracle, you will say; but for all that it was the simplest of remedies for the worst of diseases. And it cured him. So now it is the simple remedies that cure when strong drugs can do no good. I have explained the nature of your illness, and how my remedy will affect it. Will you not give it a trial?"

"Certainly," returned Mrs. Wood; "I should be wrong not to do so, since all doctors have failed me."

The remedy was adopted, and with almost magical effect. The attack returned on the appointed day, but with half its intensity; and never returned again. From that hour it may be said that Mrs. Wood recovered health in greater measure than she had ever before possessed it. The home-rejoicing can perhaps be imagined: how thanksgiving arose for so great a mercy vouchsafed; how sad eyes grew bright, and laughter and merriment no longer seemed out of place.

Mrs. Davey, it has been said, refused any reward; but it was good to hear her triumphant "I told you so!" when her success was placed beyond doubt. She carried her head, if possible, a little higher, emphasised her periods with the point of her umbrella, and was treated as one to whom honour was due.

"Reward I cannot accept," she said; "I might be taken up for practising without a diploma. And what reward, ma'am, could equal the pleasure of seeing you well again? Who

would know you for what you were when I first called three months ago? I confess that my heart sank when I thought how I might have delayed until it was too late—for it took me weeks to screw up my nerve to come to you. Every morning on getting up I said, 'To-day I will go,' and every night still hesitated, until at last I took my courage and my umbrella in both hands, and away I started, come what might. And what, after all, have I done to merit reward? Exercised a little of the gift, or whatever it may be called, which Heaven bestowed upon me, and is something quite beside me. My spirit is always longing for a field in which to exercise its faculty; I go through life like a clipped bird, longing in vain to try my wings. If I had a host of patients to attend to, night and day, I should be happy. But I might as well ask for the Crown jewels as hope to turn doctor!"

"Did it ever occur to you to become a hospital nurse?" asked Mrs. Wood.

"Yes, ma'am, but I felt it would be worse than useless. I never could be at any one's beck and call. Nature gave me some poor reasoning powers, and I think out things for myself. The doctors would have wanted their way, I have wanted mine, and we should always have been at variance. I fear there is something of the Radical in me—a slight setting at naught of authority. It is a bad quality, and it is at the root of all Radicalism. Radicals don't want reform: put them in high places, and what tyrants they become. Dictators, every one wanting his neighbour's vineyard. I do not want the things of others, and would render honour where it was due; but I do want my own way, and I should like to go

through life healing bodies, just as a good parson heals souls. Ah, ma'am! if I had lived in the days of the Apostles, I should have taken my stand with St. Luke, for he was the 'beloved physician.'"

This Mrs. Davey was indeed a strange, peculiar, and most unusual character. She was a woman whom Nature had placed altogether out of her sphere. No doubt, as she expressed it, her life was more or less sacrificed to a longing for work and a field of labour denied to her by her want of position and education. Her mental capacities, lying fallow, only rendered her supremely unhappy. She had married, but as women of strong minds often do—measuring others' capacities by their own until the awakening—she had chosen a man her inferior in all mental qualities; weak, irresolute; neither industrious nor amiable; as she once remarked of him, neither useful nor ornamental. As time went on she had to become the bread-winner and home-supporter. Of children she fortunately had none, and therefore life was not as hard with her as it might have been.

In earlier days she had gone through some great crisis or tragedy which had left its mark upon her for good, and from which she had come forth a strong, determined, thoughtful woman; going her way in silence, minding her own business, thinking nothing of her neighbours' affairs; biding her time, as she one day observed, until she passed out of this existence into one where possibly she might find more congenial surroundings. What the tragedy had been was never known, but she once remarked that it was more tragic, more wonderful, and more overwhelming than anything imagination had ever

conceived. As she spoke, her very face turned pale, her eyes glowed, she shuddered dramatically; but never again would she approach the subject even with the faintest confession. No earthly power could have induced her to utter a word or perform an action against her will. In the days of torture she would have gone through all to the bitter end; neither rack nor stake turning her from her purpose.

It followed that whenever this singular woman came into contact with her superiors in position or culture, she opened her mind and indulged in her favourite power of argument—and a power it certainly was. But with Mrs. Wood the occasions had to be few and far between, for Mrs. Davey, in her crude but original way, would plunge into philosophy and metaphysics and controversies with which her hearer, who never argued, had no sympathy, and no nervous power wherewith to contend.

ABBEVILLE.

CHAPTER XVIII

"I leave thy praises unexpressed
In verse that brings myself relief,
And by the measure of my grief
I leave thy greatness to be guessed."

LANCASTER TERRACE.

THE scene was about to change. The time for leaving Norwood was approaching. *East Lynne*, we have said, was written through illness and suffering; much of it when the frail form was too weak to sit up, the hand found it an effort to hold the pen, and life seemed sad and hopeless.

When Mrs. Davey first appeared the work was approaching completion. Three-fourths had been published in Colburn's *New Monthly Magazine.*

The writer remembers well how the interest in the portions published month by month went hand in hand with anxiety for the health of the author; and the certain atmosphere of intense sadness thrown over *East Lynne* in those days clings to it still. Every monthly part seemed like the swan song, the last effort before the pen was laid down for ever.

Very few were in the confidence of the author when *East Lynne* was appearing. As in all other things, so in this, Mrs. Wood was quiet and retiring. In her own house she scarcely ever spoke of her work, for which she had too great a reverence and regard to make it a theme of ordinary conversation.

Amongst the few in this confidence was Mary Howitt; and one especial letter of hers gave Mrs. Wood much pleasure. It was the first criticism she had received upon *East Lynne*, and, coming from one who had herself been for many years a popular writer, seemed to foreshadow success.

"My dear Mrs. Wood," it began, "I cannot tell you how high an opinion I have of *East Lynne*, as far as I have read it in the monthly parts; but this I will say: that you have only to publish the work with your name attached to it, and you will at once become famous."

A short time after this, *East Lynne* appeared.

Mary Howitt was one of those friends for whom Mrs. Wood had a great regard. At the time of which we are writing Mr. and Mrs. Howitt were living at Highgate, where Mrs. Wood occasionally visited them. In those days they had taken up the new movement of spiritual manifestations, throwing their whole earnestness into it, but their endeavour to make a con-

vert of Mrs. Wood did not succeed. Her conception of things unseen was too deep and reverential to allow of their being lightly handled; and she could not reconcile these manifestations with her ideas of spirituality. In the unseen world she had absolute faith, and thought it probable that spirits were about us, guarding and influencing our lives—if we permitted them to do so. She believed in occasional and direct manifestations from heaven; thought it possible that dreams and visions were occasionally and specially sent; on rare occasions warnings and presentiments—in short, that the link between heaven and earth was nearer and closer than is generally imagined.

But though some of her best friends, such as Mrs. Howitt and Mrs. Milner-Gibson, took up the question of spiritualism, and spent much time in what had become a fashion of the day, Mrs. Wood could never be persuaded to have anything to do with it. Some things, it is true, puzzled her—such as the extraordinary geometrical drawings which Mr. Howitt frequently showed her, declaring that they had been done under spiritual influence, he merely holding the pencil. That a perfect circle could be drawn in this way by one who drew little himself was certainly remarkable, but the truth of the assertion was of course not to be questioned.

Beyond this, Mrs. Wood never discovered anything to make her believe in the truth of the so-called manifestations. Once at Dieppe her friend Mrs. Milner-Gibson had persuaded her to accompany her to the house of a certain Madame de B. This lady, like Mrs. Milner-Gibson, was a genuine believer. That chairs and tables should float about rooms, that bonbons

should scatter like snowflakes, that hair should be pulled, hands pressed, and arms pinched, all this they accepted in faith. Mrs. Wood could not do so, but she willingly accompanied her friend to the séance. The writer was also present. A great medium had come down from Paris, and unusual results were expected. In a large room the guests sat upon chairs placed in rows. Most of them were eager and excited. That Mrs. Milner-Gibson should have accepted the movement so warmly always surprised Mrs. Wood, for she was gifted with extreme shrewdness and penetration, a woman of great intellect, and one of the most admirable conversationalists of her time, to whom it was delightful to listen; "the second most perfect hostess in England," Talleyrand once remarked of her. But that she had firm faith was certain. On the present occasion the medium was half an hour late in arriving, but arrived quietly animated and evidently in admirable "form." He was told that Mrs. Henry Wood was present, and his genuineness would be narrowly scrutinised. For a moment a shade of anxiety and vexation was visible, but it passed. The room was darkened, and the audience waited. After a long pause some one declared they heard a tambourine in a corner of the ceiling; then, after a longer pause, there seemed to rise a pale dim vapour at the end of the room, but it disappeared. After that nothing happened but an uneasy silence and waiting. "What is the matter?" asked Madame de B. "Why don't the spirits appear and do something?"

"They are not responsive to-night," the medium said at last, in a strained, nervous voice. "They declare there is some one in the room antagonistic to them, and they will not perform

before her. The séance must terminate." And terminate it did, without manifestations, to the disappointment of many. The next night there was another séance, at which Mrs. Wood was not present, and great things were done, and every one was much impressed.

In appearance, manner, and conversation, Mrs. Howitt always seemed much more fervent and devotional than her husband. There was a great charm about her. Mrs. Wood frequently remarked that she had never known any one who so differed from the impression made upon you by her letters. These letters were all life, energy, and action; you fancied the writer one of those who govern the world by a strong personality. Instead of this she was the quietest and gentlest of women, speaking in subdued tones, never self-asserting: qualities which always found their way to Mrs. Wood's heart.

We specially remember one day when Mary Howitt had been spending the afternoon with Mrs. Wood, who was then staying in Lancaster Terrace, Regent's Park. The conversation had turned on spiritualism; not the manifestation of spirits through the medium of chairs and tables, but the spiritual world itself—how far it surrounded us, and how far even dreams and visions might be sent to us through their agency.

Both Mrs. Howitt and Mrs. Wood had had a few remarkable experiences.

"I will tell you one of mine," said Mrs. Howitt. "I was seated one morning in my study writing a book, which I had promised to finish by a certain date. Suddenly everything around me seemed to fade and disappear, and another scene arose. I was no longer at home, but distinctly saw before me

a wide tract of country; it was wild and barren, such as I had never known, never visited. I knew that I was in Australia. The land was desolate and deserted. In the midst of it was a sheet of water—a large pond or small lake. As I gazed I saw men approaching; I read anxiety and concern upon their faces; I could tell that they were in trouble. Then, with appliances they had with them, I saw them drag a body out of the water. It was that of a young man, dead, and as they turned it towards me the full light of heaven shone upon the face, and I saw that it was the face of my son. I watched them slowly walking across the plain, carrying their sad burden.

"Then the vision faded, and I found myself seated at my table. How long it had lasted I know not; probably only a few moments. I was overwhelmed. 'If this be true,' I said aloud, 'I can never finish this book and fulfil my engagement.' I sent for my husband and told him all that had happened. We both felt that our son was dead, and that we should hear of it before long. We prepared ourselves for bad news. It did not tarry. We received all particulars—I do not doubt from one of the men who appeared in my vision. My son had been drowned; everything had happened exactly as I had seen it; I could myself have written the letter and described place and circumstances. I see it all now distinctly, as I talk to you. It was a merciful interposition of Providence to prepare me for what was coming."

"Was it not closely allied to what the Scotch call second-sight?" asked Mrs. Wood.

"I think not altogether," returned Mary Howitt. "Scotch second-sight, if I mistake not—in which I believe Sir Walter

Scott himself had strong faith—refers invariably to things about to happen; my vision referred to what was already past; and then, I think that only the Scotch themselves have the gift of second-sight."

"I don't know," returned Mrs. Wood. "If second-sight and such things really exist, I am inclined to believe that all who are of Celtic origin may be susceptible to these influences. The Celtic temperament seems more closely allied to the spiritual than the Saxon."

"Partly through their more vivid imagination—I agree with you," returned Mary Howitt. "And you and I," she smiled, "both have something of the Celt in us. Nearly all great writers have possessed Celtic blood. Not," she added modestly, "that I would call myself great, although mine has become a household name; but I think my talent consists rather in translating the ideas of others than in giving out my own—though for many years I have not known what it is for my pen not to be busy with my own thoughts. But your talent, my dear friend, is all your own. Did I not once tell you that you had only to publish *East Lynne* to become famous? It is only such power as yours that can, like Lord Byron, awake one morning to find itself famous. And your reputation will be lasting. Your books are photographs of real life; your characters are human beings and our personal friends—they can never die. You will be read long after many of us are forgotten."

Yet there had been a moment when it seemed possible that *East Lynne* might not fulfil Mrs. Howitt's prophecy. We have all heard of many great works rejected in the first instance

by the publishers. People are slow to recognise genius. It is a new departure, and the unfamiliar seldom pleases. When Scott read his first novel to an acquaintance, his remark was, "My friend, you have made a great name as a poet, but you will make a very indifferent one as a novelist." Scott, however, was not to be discouraged; nor did *Waverley* go the round of the publishers; but if Scott's first critic had been his publisher's reader, the story might have returned to him to be shut up in his desk for another twenty years.

In later days we know that *Jane Eyre* met with many rejections, until it fell into the hands of one who sat up all night to read it. Charlotte Brontë, in her far-away Yorkshire vicarage, had begun to give up hope when acceptance came as a ray of sunshine into her solitary life. She was no longer to be self-depreciating and unknown, turning in despair from her own reflection; the small, dark, old-fashioned being, whom to see was not to love.

East Lynne did not go quite the round of the publishers as in the instance of *Jane Eyre*, but it might have done so had it not found favour with the late Mr. Richard Bentley.

It was first offered to Messrs. Chapman and Hall. As the publishers of *Bentley's Miscellany* and Colburn's *New Monthly Magazine*, Mrs. Wood had been brought into slight but pleasant acquaintance with Mr. Frederick Chapman; and it was her rule to render honour where honour was due, expecting the same in return. Though Harrison Ainsworth was the proprietor of these magazines, Messrs. Chapman and Hall issued them; to these gentlemen, therefore, *East Lynne* was offered.

It was refused on the report of their Reader. Yet they were so convinced of the merits of the work, that Mr. Chapman told Mrs. Wood they did what they had never done before, and returned the work for the Reader's further consideration. Harrison Ainsworth, who thought very highly of the work and its chances of future success, had said so to Messrs. Chapman and Hall, advising them to secure it. A second time the Reader's report was unfavourable, and *East Lynne* was declined.

"I think you are making a mistake," Mrs. Wood remarked to Mr. Chapman, after their second decision. "I am sure the book will succeed."

"I think so too," he replied. "But we have made it a rule never to publish upon an unfavourable verdict, and it is a rule we have never broken. We are more or less slaves to red tape in business."

"You should have made *East Lynne* the exception," laughed Mrs. Wood; for she liked Mr. Chapman, and was disappointed at their refusal. That they did not do so, he afterwards acknowledged was their infinite regret. Later, when Mrs. Wood was visiting Mr. Harrison Ainsworth, the subject was mentioned.

"Chapman and Hall have never ceased to repent," he said. "I cannot imagine on what plan they take or decline manuscripts. They publish a work that has no chance of success simply because the turn of a phrase or an isolated incident happens to take the Reader's fancy, and when such a book as *East Lynne* is brought under their notice, they pass it over. I was never more amazed than when Frederick Chapman told me they had returned it to you."

"Yet I had great difficulty in persuading you to let me write it," remarked Mrs. Wood, who always found it a little hard to forgive Mr. Ainsworth for refusing year after year to accept anything but short stories from her—a matter presently referred to. "Why were you so unwilling that I should write a novel?"

Mr. Ainsworth laughed. "Your short stories were so good that I could desire nothing better," he replied. "And they were so popular that the magazines could not get on without them. A long novel could not take their place with the readers."

But there was also another reason, which he did not mention. He had a conviction that Mrs. Wood's first published novel would make her famous, and, her fame once established, he felt that he should lose her. He was unwilling to run the risk, and only yielded when Mrs. Wood at length refused to write any more short stories for his magazines.

East Lynne was next offered to Messrs. Smith and Elder. Perhaps it did not fall into the hands of the Reader who had sat up all night with *Jane Eyre*. Or perhaps it did, and found no favour with him. However this may have been, Messrs. Smith and Elder briefly and politely declined the work. When it was returned it bore every appearance of not having been opened, and it had only remained one day with the well-known publishers in Cornhill.

This second rejection was depressing, and Mrs. Wood began to wonder whether the sickness of hope deferred, the experience of so many, was again to become hers. But the trials of past years enabled her to bear this also with fortitude.

It next came under the consideration of Mr. Bentley, who at once accepted it. So far suspense was over. But the great trial was to come—whether or not it would find favour with the world. That was soon to be proved. "I should not publish it," Mr. Bentley said to Mrs. Wood, "but I feel sure of its success"; a remark she afterwards repeated to her husband.

"I suppose that may be taken for granted," he laughed. "Mr. Bentley probably thinks the same of all the works he brings out, though in this instance I do not doubt his judgment."

"You have not sent me a motto for it," said Mr. Bentley, "and I like mottoes."

"I don't think the public care for them," laughed Mrs. Wood. "Nine people out of ten would never read it. But I will send you one."

She had no poet at hand but Shakespeare and Longfellow. Mr. and Mrs. Wood had never intended to settle at Norwood, and many of their worldly possessions were packed and stored away. Much of Shakespeare Mrs. Wood knew by heart; but she was also fond of Longfellow, who in his peculiar way is very human, and adapts himself readily to quotation. Mrs. Wood was in sympathy with his earnest and reverent tone, and taking up the volume, from *The Courtship of Miles Standish* soon found what she wanted:

> "Truly the heart is deceitful, and out of its depths of corruption
> Rise, like an exhalation, the misty phantoms of passion:
> Angels of light they seem, but are only delusions of Satan.
> . . . . . .
> This is the cross I must bear; the sin and the swift retribution."

The text was so applicable to the story that Longfellow might have written it for that purpose. They are also some of his best and truest lines. "I am delighted with it," wrote Mr. Bentley when acknowledging its receipt, "and shall advertise it with the book."

After that nearly all Mrs. Wood's mottoes were taken from Longfellow; every motto wonderfully fitting to its story, almost telling the burden of the book; and much must be said for the poet who can furnish thoughts at once so sweet and simple, so true and earnest.

Mrs. Wood loved many of the poets, but by no means all. The dreamy and metaphysical, such as Shelley, occupied with abstruse questions, unrestful searchings into problems never to be decided, eager to solve all mysteries, longing to penetrate beyond the veil before the veil was lifted: with such she had little sympathy. Shakespeare she ever loved; Longfellow, Byron, parts of Tennyson, she never tired of reading. A little of Mrs. Browning, but not the more obscure writings of her husband;—apropos of whom we may relate the following short anecdote, which came under our own experience.

A friend was staying with him. One morning he came down into the breakfast-room before Robert Browning, and whilst waiting took up one of his poems. He lighted upon a passage that he read and re-read, but found it impossible to understand. When Browning entered the room he passed the volume to him, asking for interpretation. The poet also read and re-read the passage, and then confessed that he must give it up. "I have no doubt that I knew what I meant when I wrote it," he laughed, "but I don't know now."

Many of the old song-writers Mrs. Wood delighted in. There was scarcely an old and famous ballad that she could not repeat; and if her friends in singing any of them forgot the words, she was always able to come to the rescue. She was so especially fond of a short poem of Christina Rossetti's, *Amor Mundi*, and it is so associated with her in our own mind, that we venture to quote it. The verses were partly explained by an illustration. A youth and maiden meet in the valley of life. The one greets the other, and finally they turn together into the downhill path:—

" ' Oh, where are you going, with your love-locks flowing,
On the west wind blowing, along this valley track?'
' This downhill path is easy, come with me an' it please ye,
We shall escape the uphill by never turning back.'

" So they two went together, in glowing August weather,
The honey-breathing heather lay to their left and right;
And dear she was to dote on, her twin-feet seemed to float on
The air, like soft twin pigeons too sportive to alight.

" ' Oh, what is that in heaven, where gray cloud-flakes are seven,
Where blackest clouds hang riven just at the rainy skirt?'
' Oh, that's a meteor sent us, a message dumb, portentous,
An undeciphered, solemn signal of help or hurt.'

" ' Oh, what is that glides quickly where velvet flowers grow thickly,
Their scent comes rich and sickly?' ' A scaled and hooded worm.'
' Oh, what's that in the hollow, so pale, I quake to follow?'
' Oh, that's a thin dead body which waits the eternal term.'

" ' Turn again, oh, my sweetest, turn again, false and fleetest,
This way whereof thou weetest I fear is hell's own track.'
' Nay, too steep for hill-mounting, nay, too late for cost-counting:
This downhill path is easy, but there's no turning back.' "

Another poem which had always attracted her was *The*

Twin Genii, by Mrs. Plarr, and it led to a slight but pleasant incident. The verses first appeared anonymously many years ago in *Household Words*, long before its editor had laid down for ever his magic pen. Years afterwards Mrs. Wood quoted them in a *Johnny Ludlow* paper, not knowing who had written them or whether the author were still living. Mrs. Plarr immediately wrote to Johnny Ludlow, saying how much pleasure it had given her to find that he so much appreciated the lines. Johnny Ludlow was still unknown; no one dreamed that he was Mrs. Henry Wood, and Mrs. Plarr, like the rest of the world, never supposed that the author was of her own sex.

About the same time an amusing letter was received from Tom Hood directed to Johnny Ludlow, under cover to Messrs. Richard Bentley and Son. It stated with what pleasure he had read the papers, and how much he should like to make Johnny's acquaintance, and ended by asking if he would not spend an evening with him, and over a cigar discuss notes and reminiscences of old college days. We can imagine the amusement the note caused the author of *Johnny Ludlow*. But it was only one of many similar letters received from strangers anxious to know who Johnny Ludlow was, or to make his acquaintance.

We have quoted *Amor Mundi*, and venture to quote *The Twin Genii*, for we feel that in any record of Mrs. Henry Wood it would give her pleasure to include it. Both poems strike as it were the same keynote; and it is the key-note struck by Mrs. Wood herself in so many of her books —the inevitable law of Compensation.

" There are twin genii who, strong and mighty,
Under their guidance mankind retain ;
And the name of the lovely one is Pleasure,
And the name of the loathly one is Pain.
Never divided where one can enter,
Ever the other comes close behind,
And he who in Pleasure his thoughts would centre,
Surely Pain in the search shall find !

" Alike they are, though in much they differ—
Strong resemblance is 'twixt the twain ;
So that sometimes you may question whether
It can be Pleasure that you feel, or Pain.
Thus 'tis that whatever of deep emotion
Stirreth the heart—be it grave or gay—
Tears are the symbol ; from feeling's ocean
These are the fountains that rise to-day.

" Should not this teach us calmly to welcome
Pleasure when smiling our hearths beside ?
If she be the substance, how dark the shadow ;
Close doth it follow the near allied.
Or if Pain long o'er our threshold hover,
Let us not question but Pleasure nigh
Bideth her time her face to discover,
Rainbow of Hope in a clouded sky ! "

One more we quote, which was an especial favourite with Mrs. Wood, and which she introduces into *Mrs. Halliburton's Troubles* :—

" How rarely, friend, a good, great man inherits
Honour and wealth with all his worth and pains !
It seems a fable from the land of spirits
When any man gets that which he merits,
Or any merits that which he obtains."
" For shame, my friend ! renounce this idle strain :
What wouldst thou have the good great man obtain ?—
Wealth ? Title ? Dignity ? A golden chain ?

Or heaps of corpses which his sword hath slain?
Goodness and greatness are not means but ends.
Hath he not always treasures, always friends,
The good, great man? Three treasures—Life, and Light,
And calm thoughts equable as infant's breath;
And three fast friends, more sure than day or night,
Himself, his Maker, and the angel, Death."

Such simple poetry Mrs. Wood loved. In earlier life she wrote several historical plays in rhyme and blank verse: the theme of one being Catherine de Médicis and the Eve of St. Bartholomew; of another, the times and surroundings of Lady Jane Grey; but these she destroyed, though she afterwards regretted doing so. With the generality of readers she thought poetry unpopular, and that the element introduced into novels rendered them unpopular also. For this reason her love for poetry, and the great storehouse of poetry treasured up in her memory are not set forth in her writings.

In Picardy.

CHAPTER XIX

"But what of that? My darken'd ways
Shall ring with music all the same;
To breathe my loss is more than fame,
To utter love more sweet than praise."

EDGAR TOWER, WORCESTER.

WHEN *East Lynne* appeared, Mrs. Wood's health had rallied from the strain of her long illness. All her energy returned, and day after day would see her at work in her reclining chair. Indeed, in later years, with artificial support, she was able to do what had once been impossible —to write at her table.

Every author has his own way of working and his own times. Some authors can only write when they feel themselves

in the vein. Days and weeks pass and the spirit does not move them. It was so with Charlotte Brontë, Mrs. Gaskell has told us. For months all power seemed to leave her; inspiration failed; ideas would not flow. Then some morning, without knowing why or wherefore, she would awake in all the fervour of the "creative mood." But Charlotte Brontë's mind was soon exhausted; it was not a well yielding supplies for ever; and before her death—early though it was—her real work seemed to be ended.

Mrs. S. C. Hall once told us that she could not herself write continuously; after a certain amount of work the brain grew empty and would do no more; and she often had to take weeks and months of rest before the pen could be taken up again.

This allusion to Mrs. Hall recalls a slight incident once witnessed in her drawing-room which proved that even wise women are sometimes weak in small matters.

It was an afternoon reception at her house in the Boltons, and the rooms were fairly crowded. In one part a group had gathered, of which Mrs. Hall was the centre. We happened to be next to her, and near her was a young clergyman. Books—her own writings—were at the moment the topic of conversation. Mrs. Hall had made some remark which brought up the subject, and for once the feeling was put aside that it is better not to discuss the works of an author in his presence.

"Mrs. Hall," said the clergyman, "I remember reading your books when I was a child, and being especially delighted with your Irish stories."

"Then, sir," quickly rebuked Mrs. Hall, "if you read my books when you were a child, you ought to know better than to say so!" And she left the divine crushed and uncomfortable.

It was done on the impulse of the moment, for a kindlier heart than Mrs. Hall's never beat, or a nature more careful not to wound the sensitiveness of others. The offence was also incomprehensible, for the Irish stories must have been written twenty years before the young clergyman was born, and Mrs. Hall must then have been at least seventy years old —and looked even more, for the plaits she wore fastened by a cameo in the centre of the forehead added to her age. This occurred many years ago; but if the hero is still living he must remember the episode which gave him so uncomfortable a moment that he soon after made his bow and withdrew.

Another instance of this sensitiveness to age we found in the late Mrs. Kavanagh, the mother of Julia Kavanagh, of whom we have already spoken. She was a woman of great powers of mind, of vivid imagination, of unusual force of character; but here was her heel of Achilles. At this time, too, she was almost blind, and long past eighty years of age.

She had been one day with her French maid to the cemetery at Nice to visit the magnificent tomb she had erected to her daughter: a monument built by degrees. First a quiet grave, with a small white cross and stone, pure as the life of the gifted being whose remains reposed there. But Mrs. Kavanagh's ambition was never satisfied; she thought nothing sufficiently beautiful to mark her daughter's resting-place; and in the end a magnificent white marble tomb was the result.

Within a few yards are the slopes of the Riviera, stretching downwards to the shore, wedding all their richness of tone to the blue waters of the Mediterranean. Before this monument Mrs. Kavanagh was standing with her maid. Julia Kavanagh's age—fifty-four—was recorded; and she had been dead some years. The maid, contemplating the inscription, at length remarked:

"Madame must be very old."

"Old!" exclaimed Mrs. Kavanagh. "Why should I be old? What do you know about my age?"

"Mademoiselle was fifty-four when she died," pointing to the record, "and she has been dead some time; therefore Madame must be very old."

This troubled Mrs. Kavanagh, and the next day she sent a mason and had the age removed. Yet one would have supposed—clever, unusually strong-minded, almost blind, and more than eighty—that she must have outlived such feelings by many years; especially as her daughter's death had ever since been a ceaseless pain and trouble to her. But the heart is capricious; and perhaps it is natural that we should all try to retain some fragments and illusions of youth to the last. Both mother and daughter, so beautiful in their lives, have long slept in the same tomb, and both have reached that shore where time no longer exists and people never grow old. As a proof of Mrs. Kavanagh's spirit and strength of mind, we may mention that when long past eighty she travelled alone from Nice to Paris, and underwent a successful operation for cataract, seating herself heroically in the chair, and refusing chloroform or any other deadening medium.

But we were speaking of the way in which people do their work; the ebb and flow of inspiration.

With Mrs. Wood it was never fluctuating. She never knew what it was not to be in the humour for writing. It was not only that she could always write, but she ever felt a desire to do so—a power urging her, whether she would or no. It was always her delight; and she would sometimes remark that if we carried our occupations with us into the next world nothing would give her greater pleasure than to go on writing books for ever. It would have been impossible to live without writing. As Julia Kavanagh once remarked, on one of the many pleasant evenings we spent with her in Paris: "The work once taken up can never be laid aside again. It is as necessary as food and sleep. The sacred fire must be kept burning." Julia Kavanagh did not live long enough to feel her powers failing; and Mrs. Wood's faculties remained fresh and spontaneous to the end. She never suffered from the feeling of a loss of power, which it has been said was the dread of Charles Dickens, and a trouble of his later days.

Mrs. Wood at all times wrote easily and rapidly, scarcely ever pausing for word or idea. The great amount of thought and deliberation bestowed upon her books was always at the commencement.

She would first compose her plot—a matter of extreme care and deliberation, where nothing was passed over or hurried. This would take her about three weeks of very close application, and until the whole was accomplished not one word of the novel was written. Characters, motives, incident and

action—everything was duly and deeply weighed, until all threads were well in hand.

Having decided upon the main subject of the work, she next divided her matter into the requisite number of chapters, giving to each chapter its leading idea. After this every separate chapter was again elaborated; every incident was carefully thought out and recorded—the most trifling and the most important—from the first chapter to the last, from the opening to the closing scenes.

Thus, before a line of the story was begun, plot and drama stood out in a complete form, the various characters endowed with life and reality; everything existed not only as a clear picture in the author's brain, but in black and white, a solid foundation to work upon. Once thought out, plot and incidents were never changed; the story, in being written, did not develop fresh views and possibilities. It was not permitted to do so; the author had her matter well in hand—a fixed purpose. The various characters, their work, actions, ultimate destinies, had passed into the inevitable. To herself her dramas and characters had a very real existence. Morning by morning, as she turned to her work, she had only to take up her elaborated notes and the day's task stood out clearly before her.

From this it will be seen that her novels, reading so easily and naturally that they almost seem to have written themselves, in reality cost her immense thought and labour. Every character had been long and thoroughly considered. As in the plays of the Comédie Française the least prominent actor must play his part as perfectly as the greatest, so was it with

Mrs. Wood's *dramatis personæ*. Upon the most trivial personage a full share of consideration had been bestowed. This gave her unusual power, for she took her stories in hand with, as it were, the gift of a seer, ruling the destinies of her creations.

The plot of each novel occupied many pages of close writing. We have said that each plot would take about three weeks of intense application; and on these occasions she would often relax her rule, and work far into the afternoon. At these times she could not bear the slightest interruption, for the thread of her argument once broken, she was seldom able to take it up again the same day.

It may be interesting to place before the reader the outline of a plot for one of the *Johnny Ludlow* stories—the only outline that we possess, and which was accidentally preserved. This was the sketch for only a very short tale occupying a few pages, and was a very different matter from the elaborated plot of a three-volume novel with its numerous incidents and characters. The one was a work of weeks, the other of hours. But it is sufficient to give an idea of Mrs. Henry Wood's manner of working. The story "In Later Years," was published in the *Argosy* for December 1887, after the author had passed away.

"In Later Years."

"Valentine Chandler has broken down; has also had an illness. Is going to Canada. Jane calls at North Villa—sees him—he is on a sofa at home alone. They talk. No crying, but both subdued. Will *try* to pull up over there. Johnny walks home with Jane. Preparations for Val's departure.

Mrs. Jacob Chandler has taken small place at Crabb; has let North Villa to the Miss Dennetts. Another interview—Jane and Val—one of the girls is sitting over the fire with Johnny. Val, pretty well now, sits down to piano and sings, 'Remember me, tho' rolling ocean.' Window is open to the sighing, moaning wind of the coming winter. She stands just outside to listen. Walks away in distress—with her 'aching heart,' as the song says. Valentine follows her—she is in the arbour already spoken of—where Mrs. Cramp held her interview with Jacob on the Sunday afternoon many years before. They sit down; neither can speak for pain. It is their last interview — the last evening. Last conversation — aching hearts. Jane cries; *he* cries. Ah, how bitter these parting tears are! Some few of us, but I think not many, could testify to that. Johnny is ready to go home with Jane. '*I'll* go this evening,' says Val, and they go off together, nearly in silence. He takes her past the Inlets; says his last farewell at the gate; takes his last kiss.

"Juliet arrives on visit to Mrs. Cramp—brings friend with her—Cherry Dawson; a pretty, rattling sort of girl. Strikes up a flirtation with Fred Scott. Fred and Juliet (had discarded Juliet-*ta*) had had a love affair, or at least flirtation together. Cherry cuts Juliet out. Juliet receives letter to say sister seriously ill and wants her. Goes, leaving field open to Cherry. Back in a week. Cherry declares that she and Fred are engaged. Great disturbance. Juliet says she'll haunt her for ever. Disappears. Straw hat and white frock found on bank of eel-pond at bottom of grounds. Written on

WORCESTER CATHEDRAL FROM THE SEVERN.

paper pinned to frock: 'I'll haunt her for ever.' Cherry, not bad-hearted, in great distress. Fred Scott, questioned by Mrs. Cramp, says he never wanted to have either of them. 'Why, how could I?' he asks reasonably. 'I've no money to keep a wife and a house upon. The girls laughed and joked with me, and I laughed and joked back again.' Nothing to be heard of Juliet—pond dragged—nothing comes up but eels—Georgie arrives in distress—Clementina most heartless about it—writes word it served Juliet right for her flirting folly, and she only hoped she'd haunt Cherry till her hair turned gray with fright. Of course Tod and Johnny are in it.

"Autumn weather. Mrs. Jacob Chandler away, and house shut up. Jane goes out one evening at dusk to Mrs. Sym's on an errand for her mother—meets Valentine. He has come home for her. Tells him of the distress about Juliet. He does not believe it; Juliet would think twice before plunging into the prettiest pond ever seen. Juliet found—is lady housekeeper to an old gentlemen in Guernsey—most likely shall marry him—has lots of money. Jane and Val marry and sail for Canada."

This ability to draw out her plots elaborately and minutely gave her, we say, unusual power. She saw clearly the end of her story from the beginning. It prevented all contradiction, omission, or mistake. Every incident received its appointed place. There was no hurrying at the end, no confusion of interests. Scarcely a single line or word will be found in any one of her books unnecessary to the story. By her characters she touches the deeper chords of human nature, whilst she

herself is carefully kept in the background. She possessed the power of making the common uncommon; and, again, of making improbabilities probable, so gradually and easily are her least probable incidents led up to. This gives her work a value not immediately apparent.

Yet nothing can be less mechanical than the manner in which the novels are written. The stories flow onward as life dramas, so real that the author might be merely recording, not creating them; one incident leads up to another as naturally as if destiny and not design had been at work. She never moralised or criticised, therefore never descended from the highest level of her faculty. If a philosopher, she was so unconsciously, for she never obtruded her personality upon the reader. She is a simple, lucid, and picturesque narrator, often creating great effects out of the most ordinary and everyday material. No wonder that her work never ceased to fascinate her. Everything outside the realms of her imagination must have seemed commonplace and prosaic. In all this lay one great secret of her success.

From a child she had written stories, which were destroyed as soon as ended, and no one ever saw a line of them. Like all such efforts, no doubt the fire was their best place; and in after years she never encouraged precociousness in children. Even to her father, closely allied as they were, her early productions were never shown. But they were a great resource. Reclining upon her couch day after day and year after year, Time must now and then have shown more of his leaden feet than of his wings, and they brightened many an hour that would otherwise have proved long and weari-

some. Many romances and fairy-tales were woven into her quiet and suffering life. Pen and paper alone endowed them with reality, but all the time the talent was growing. Even her governess, whom she ever loved and valued, and who took great pride and interest in the few works which appeared before her death, was never admitted into the secret of this inexhaustible well.

She one day remarked that she had never but once hesitated in composing a plot; seeing two ways before her, not quite certain which was the better. This was when writing *East Lynne*. And yet it must have been long in her mind; for years she had wished to begin the novel, and was only prevented by Mr. Ainsworth's refusal to take anything but short stories from her. The point in question was a leading situation in the story, and caused her much thought and deliberation. "In the end," she added, "I decided rightly, and soon saw that I had adopted the only possible course." It is certainly difficult to see how the plot of *East Lynne* could be improved or made more interesting. Here, if anywhere, the doctrine of *inevitableness* seems evident. It is full of action, yet every incident fits into its place as the different sections of a puzzle; and any change would appear to disturb the narrative.

Not very long ago a gentleman observed that a friend in America was complaining of blunted feelings. "Nothing touches me," he said, "as it once did. I neither cry nor laugh when others do, or feel moved one way or the other." "Come with me," said his friend. "They are playing *East Lynne* to-night. We will go and see it acted." And, with the

rest of the audience, he was much affected as the play went on. "I don't quite see the insensibility you complain of," said the friend as they left the theatre together. "You have relieved me," was the reply. "I thought my feelings were dead or paralysed, but to-night have found them as much alive as ever."

Until the time of *East Lynne*, Mrs. Wood was in the habit of copying everything; but *East Lynne*, partly on account of severe illness, was sent to press as it was written; and from that time she never copied again. And here, in answer to a question frequently asked, we may state that Mrs. Wood never dictated. Every word of every one of her works was written with her own hand. She used to say that she could never have dictated, for, like Dr. Johnson, the brain and the pen must go together.

Her handwriting was extremely legible, as the specimen given will show; clear and sensitive, like herself. In earlier life this was very apparent; but as years went on it grew more upright and decided, answering to the decision of character which comes with the advance of life, and we find ourselves in positions where judgment and common-sense are a daily exercise, and we have often to choose between "two alternatives." We wish there were a page of *East Lynne* to place before the reader, but the manuscript was not preserved. It was destroyed, month by month, by the printers, as the story appeared in serial form. Even had it accompanied the proofs, Mrs. Wood thought so little of these things that she would probably herself have destroyed it—as she destroyed nearly all her other manuscripts. The few now existing were accidentally retained. The specimens given belong to her earliest and latest periods.

The longer is taken from *The Red Court Farm*, one of the earliest and most popular of her works. The MS. consists of some nine hundred pages, and from beginning to end there is scarcely a correction or an erasure, marking the wonderful ease and fluency with which Mrs. Wood wrote. The accompanying page is not specially selected, and is no better than any other part of the MS. Those whose duty it was to set up the type were always glad when Mrs. Wood's "copy" fell to them. Where workmen are paid by the amount of work done and not by time a clear handwriting makes a sensible difference to the day's earnings.

Mrs. Wood's memory could recall every line and expression she had written; and if by chance the printers altered a single word, she never failed to discover it, and restore the original. When *George Canterbury's Will* was passing through the press, after the manuscript had gone in she wished to make a slight change in it. Time failed, and it was necessary for some one to call at the printers'. Mrs. Wood indicated the nature of the passage, and, as nearly as she could tell, the number of the page on which it would be found, and its position. Everything proved as described, and the new matter, some twenty lines, was substituted for the old. But only a very clear head and memory could have done this.

Memory and clearness of vision and judgment remained to the end. Yet in the last two or three years of her life she found that as regarded time and ease, she worked very unequally. Her pen was no longer quite that of a ready-writer. There were days when she wrote as quickly as ever, and others again when she

wrote very slowly indeed. It took her much longer to write her stories, and cost her much more labour; she would often alter or re-write parts of many pages, a thing unknown in earlier days. But her facility for inventing plots, if anything, increased. "I could sit down now and compose a hundred plots with the greatest ease, if I only had the strength to work them out," she remarked a short time before her death. It was all, from beginning to end, from first to last, a labour of love.

"I feel quite vexed with myself," she again remarked one morning in the last autumn of her life; "I write so slowly compared with the old days. It takes me four months to get through the amount of work I could once do in as many weeks."

But this was after the labour of many years, in which few had worked more earnestly and indefatigably.

LAC D'ANNECY.

CHAPTER XX

" 'Tis held that sorrow makes us wise ;
Yet how much wisdom sleeps with thee
Which not alone had guided me,
But served the seasons that may rise."

Old Houses, Worcester.

It has been said of many literary people that they are not domesticated. It was not so with Mrs. Henry Wood. No one ever looked more earnestly to "the ways of her household." The happiness of those about her was ever her first thought and consideration. Her house was carefully ruled, and order and system reigned. Nothing ever jarred; the domestic atmosphere was never disturbed. Her

servants were expected to do their duty without undue surveillance, and it was done thoroughly and conscientiously. They delighted to serve, appreciating the kindness with which they were treated, ever made to feel that their welfare was a matter of personal thought and consideration. It was the rarest thing for any servant to leave her, unless to be married, or for some equally good reason. At the time of her death several of her domestics had been with her for nearly a quarter of a century.

No home duty was ever neglected or put aside for literary labours. Every morning before commencing work there was the interview with the housekeeper, when the household affairs for the day were discussed and settled. Punctuality was strictly observed. In all there was no effort; no ruling excepting by kindness and quiet influence. With her it was ever—

> "Think truly and thy thoughts
> Shall the world's famine feed;
> Speak truly and each word of thine
> Shall be a fruitful seed;
> Live truly and thy life shall be
> A great and noble deed."

Mrs. Wood was now living in St. John's Wood Park, South Hampstead; a locality chosen because it was more bracing than the central parts of London. Mr. and Mrs. Wood had for a time lived in Kensington, but in its relaxing air the health of one of their children failed. They were advised to go northward, and as a test, took for some months the furnished house in Lancaster Terrace already alluded to, and which was said to possess the prettiest drawing-room in London. Here

health improved, and the house in St. John's Wood Park was finally chosen and occupied for many years. The situation was somewhat inconveniently remote, but health had to be considered before all things.

Here, early-rising was a law of the house. At seven o'clock, summer and winter, Mrs. Wood's maid entered her room, undrew the curtains, and she rose immediately after. At eight she went into her study, where, Sundays excepted, she always breakfasted alone, never coming down, save on special occasions, until two o'clock, when work was put aside. The remainder of the day was devoted to reading and conversation, receiving friends, social duties and pleasures, the exercise of that hospitality her heart delighted in.

Her dress—to bring her more vividly before the reader—was always the same for quite the latter half of her life; so that one ever had a distinct and unvarying impression of her. She wore at all times plain but rich black silk, specially made for her in Lyons, the town so associated with her early recollections; the only difference between the morning and evening dress being that the latter would be more trimmed with old laces that so well became her. Only in the extreme heat of summer would the heavier material be laid aside for some thin and flowing substance, but the colour never varied. The reader has seen her in the Alpine terraces clothed in white, listening to the rapturous nightingales; but those were the days of youth and romance, which come but once to us all.

To simple taste in dress she added another virtue. At any moment, "from early morn to dewy eve," she would have been found ready to receive the most exalted personage in the land.

Never was there a break in this rule; and as it is a merit not always seen in literary people, it is well to record a notable instance. Self-respecting and respecting others, it could not have been otherwise. And her dresses were so arranged with scarves and laces that the curvature was less evident than it might otherwise have been.

We have said that *East Lynne* and many other works were written in a reclining chair, before the days when artificial support, which added so much to the comfort of her later life, permitted her to write at a table. Yet in the earlier years of weakness and reclining, Mrs. Wood often began to write at nine in the morning, and wrote until six in the evening; work never seemed to tire or exhaust her. Only for perhaps half an hour at mid-day, for the lightest possible luncheon, would the work be put down. This was her invariable custom. Throughout life she took, it may be said, only one meal a day: a light breakfast of tea and toast, an almost equally light luncheon, a late and substantial dinner. Occasionally with luncheon a small cup of coffee; wine only with the later meal. One glass of wine, she would say, took away all power for work. For most of her life she took only light red or white French wines, also specially sent over from her beloved early home. She was at all times rigidly abstemious, never exceeding the allowance she permitted herself. In later years, immediately after dinner, before leaving the table, she would take a cup of weak tea.

We have so often been asked questions about these various small details that we do not hesitate to record them. There is no doubt a certain interest in hearing, even in trifles, how

those who have climbed the ladder of success, and gone through a long life of laborious work, have regulated the ordering of their ways, and found time and energy to accomplish so much. In these days, indeed, of "illustrated interviews" the interest has become somewhat morbid and unhealthy.

For a time the close work we have described was compulsory. About the period that *East Lynne* appeared, Mrs. Wood undertook various engagements without realising the amount of work they would entail upon her; and with her a promise was sacred. No printer or publisher was ever kept waiting a single hour for any manuscript. But the pressure of this close work presently told upon her, and she felt that it could not be continued. Those engagements fulfilled, she never again accepted anything it would be a strain to perform. In a few years she wrote only from half-past eight until half-past twelve, and the rule once made was closely kept.

Yet before that time, day after day and month after month after working from nine until six, she would be as mentally bright and animated as when the day began, able to take her place in the home circle and to be interested in all that was going forward. Books and conversation were her chief recreation, but her interest and attention were by no means confined to these objects. In games, excepting occasionally a hand at cards or a game at chess—in which, like her father, she excelled—she never joined; but it was one of her great pleasures to see others at their pastimes, and nothing gladdened her more than to be able to contribute to this end.

She was, indeed, never happier than when planning for the

good of others—whether for their pleasure or profit. None ever came to her in vain for sympathy. In matters of advice her clear judgment saw the best course to be taken; the wisest thing to be done in matters difficult or complicated. It is often said that people ask your advice for the pleasure of taking their own. With Mrs. Wood it was seldom asked and not taken, for she inspired confidence, first by her kindliness, secondly by her wisdom. With her children this, perhaps naturally, was invariably the case. In their eyes she could not err. It was impossible to live day after day, year after year, with one so true and steadfast, so sensible and far-seeing, yet so simple withal, without realising that in judgment and penetration she was a pillar of strength.

We see her now sitting in her drawing-room in her own special seat, observing all around her, her attitude full of repose, one hand holding a fan, which, if the weather were warm, she was seldom without, the other resting upon the arm of her chair, listening to some difficult problem that had crossed the path of a friend. Not a word spoken until the tale was told, and then quickly came the reply—the right course to pursue; where there had been darkness and complication all became clear as daylight. On one special occasion two young friends had, from no fault of their own but through the action of a third person, brought themselves into temporary disfavour at the Foreign Office. As both were rising in the Diplomatic Service, the case in point involved serious issues.

In their vexation and anxiety they bethought them of their wise friend, and went to her on the eve of a great interview for sympathy and advice. The whole case was laid before

LARGER DRAWING-ROOM, ST. JOHN'S WOOD PARK.

her; the story eagerly poured out. That they were blameless was true; that it might appear otherwise was equally true. What would be the result? Without hesitation their friend told them what would be said by the head of the Department; the questions asked, the view taken. "You have nothing to fear," she concluded. "Make your minds easy. You will be told in future to exercise more discretion and more care, and I think I must tell you so too; and there it will end." As they were departing, consoled and comforted, she gave them her hand, and said, "Fear nothing; all will be well."

And all so happened the next day; almost the very expressions Mrs. Wood had used the night before they heard again. Fortunately, in the head of the Department at that time—now many years ago—they found all that innate gentlemanlike courtesy and consideration and willingness to listen which do not always characterise the heads of Departments; and the true version of the case prevailed. The young men went their way rejoicing—to rise in due time to honours of which they were worthy. But they never forgot hastening to their friend and counsellor the moment the important interview was happily over, with faces from which the cares of a century had been removed. "You are a prophet!" they cried, "and must have mesmerised Sir John. The very arguments, the very words you used, he used." And then Mrs. Wood's quiet and musical laugh. "I am not by any means a prophet, but I see things pretty clearly, and happen to possess a little common-sense. I admit that your position was somewhat awkward, but your fears prevented you from judging calmly,

whilst youth and inexperience exaggerated the matter. Sir John and I are older than you; I knew exactly the view he would take of what was after all a simple affair: though I did *not* know," she laughed, "that he would honour me by using 'my very words and arguments!'"

It was ever so; above all things Mrs. Wood was quietly, eminently wise; and the line placed upon her tomb—"THE LORD GIVETH WISDOM"—refers not only to her work and its invariable tendency for good, but to herself; the great matters of her life, in which she made no mistakes; the frequent occasions on which in the troubled portion of that life she had to exercise supreme wisdom; her everyday home life, which she so beautified, and which in itself ever requires so much patience and tact; its singular harmony; the few errors that occurred, the smoothness with which everything was directed. Her voice was never heard in anger or even in reproach. Discouragement she held to be the greatest of errors; but everything that weakened the strict principles of life was quietly avoided. Sceptical books were never opened. No matter what the reputation of such a work, its pages never entered her house. With St. Paul she forsook all "vain and foolish babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called." She had her reward in that Faith never failed her; nothing was more real to her, nothing more present, than the "things unseen." Argument of every description she disliked. In politics she took no part, beyond being a strong Conservative. Inequality she recognised as a Divine law, but her sympathies were far-reaching. All social movements affecting the people or country

SMALLER DRAWING-ROOM, ST. JOHN'S WOOD PARK.

she followed with keenest interest; and none living had their true welfare more at heart. How earnestly this was the case, and how clearly she saw into the future, is evidenced in her story of *A Life's Secret.*

At the commencement of this chapter we have said that Mrs. Wood was an early riser. This recalls to mind what was to her á very singular and constant source of pleasure, even of delight.

In sleep she was ever haunted by dreams vivid and lasting, and always singularly beautiful and consecutive. The remembrance of them did not fade, as they do with most people. Whole histories and dramas would pass before her. She was ever wandering in lovely realms, amidst greenest valleys and sweetest flowers. More beautiful than anything earthly were these nightly visions, peopled by her personal friends. Elysian fields, the plains of Paradise, ever seemed the abode of her spirit when, night after night, sleep spread his gentle mantle over her. These dreams never forsook her; in the very last days she would say how beautiful they had been. We cannot wonder at this in one whose imagination was continually exercised, and to whom an unkindly thought or uncharitable word was unknown. One of her remarkable traits was an utter self-unconsciousness. It never occurred to her to be a shining light to others, only to be true to herself. Nothing was farther from her mind, nor would she have dreamed of it in her humility. The letters left to her children, to be opened after her death, which were difficult to read from their touching beauty and fervent tone, spoke more freely and openly, were more exhorting

to the "better life," than perhaps anything she had ever said when present with them. She ever looked upwards, but silently.

Only thus can so consistent a life be lived. Otherwise the disturbing elements of earth must inevitably come in, with their discord and failure. Human nature is at best erring, and Mrs. Henry Wood would have been the very first to consider herself imperfect: for the nearer we grow to holiness the more we see our own deficiencies; the greater the knowledge, the more one realises how little is known in comparison with what has yet to be known. Human nature, we say, is at best imperfect; but, as far as it was possible, hers was a perfect life. For the rest, her works bear witness. Man cannot paint beauties he does not see, but only gives out of that which is within him.

MALVERN ABBEY.

CHAPTER XXI

"Thy voice is on the rolling air ;
I hear thee where the waters run ;
Thou standest in the rising sun,
And in the setting thou art fair."

QUEEN ELIZABETH'S HOUSE, WORCESTER.

As soon as the proof-sheets of *East Lynne* had been corrected, Mr. and Mrs. Wood went abroad, their first destination being Dieppe, a place they both so much liked, and which at this time was the most fashionable watering-place in France.

Their object in leaving England was partly to obtain rest and change. They had not been abroad for nearly three years, and this seemed to them almost like exile. During Mrs.

Wood's lengthened illness it had been impossible to leave home. Moreover, *East Lynne* was being written, and, as in her worst paroxysms she could not write, it had taken her from first to last quite two years to complete the work.

Another great inducement to leaving England was to escape the remarks and reviews in connection with the book. As a first work, on which so much depended, Mrs. Wood was naturally nervous as to its reception; and to change scene and country was the best way of passing over the period of uncertainty.

They also longed once more to breathe the air and see the friends of other days. Correspondence had been kept up, and to many a question "When are you coming to us again?" the answer had to be long doubtful. Though France had ceased to be home, they only loved it the more—as we all love the years and scenes that are past. Previous visits had been red-letter days in their lives, looked forward to, intensely enjoyed. The impulsive, enthusiastic French temperament was exhilarating and refreshing; after the heavy atmosphere and colder character of the English, the sunny French skies seemed to bring back youth and happiness—*les beaux jours de la vie*—with which the gray skies and east winds of our island would not bear comparison. The moment they touched French shores the old life was resumed, and high and low conspired to give them welcome. Amidst old scenes and old friends, they would make a sort of royal progress.

They had left England partly to avoid the reviews, but fate pursued them. No sooner had they settled down in their hotel than Mrs. Wood took up by chance the first paper that

came to hand. It happened to be the *Daily News*, and the very first thing that arrested her attention was a review of *East Lynne*, almost the first to appear.

"This is a work of remarkable power," it began. "It is concerned with the passions; and exhibits that delicacy of touch and knowledge of the emotional part of our mental structure which would reveal the sex of the author even without the help of the title-page. The great merit of the work consists in an artistic juxtaposition of characters strongly contrasted with one another."

Then followed an analysis of the plot, concluding with :—

"The story displays a force of description and dramatic completeness we have seldom seen surpassed. The interest of the narrative intensifies itself to the deepest pathos, and shakes the feelings. The closing scene, where the dying penitent, under the impulse of strong human affection, reveals herself to her lost husband and is at length forgiven, is in the highest degree tragic, and the whole management of the story exhibits unquestionable genius and originality."

One can imagine the pleasure with which the author read these first words of recognition. Their influence must have sweetened all the days of her stay abroad. The beauties of earth, the sparkling sea—ever the greatest delight to her—the blue skies of *la belle Normandie*, the sunshine, fields, and flowers, must have gained a charm they never possessed before as she began to realise a day when she would be known and appreciated.

It had been a dream long delayed. For, as we have seen, Mrs. Henry Wood commenced her literary career at a time

when many writers have begun to think of giving up work. Scott was forty-five when his first book was written, and Mrs. Wood was more than forty-five when *East Lynne* appeared.

Those days in Dieppe must have been gilded with a secret rapture. The world must have once more seemed very fair to the patient, much-tried spirit. If the reward had been long in coming, it promised to be great. For she knew her own talent and had confidence in herself—what else had given her courage to go on writing for ten years without remuneration or any other return?—and ever felt that success would one day be hers. Both she and her husband were especially fond of the Château d'Arques, with its ruined and romantic walls and lovely views over the undulating country; and more bright and sunny and beautiful than ever they must have looked to her whose days had seen much care and sorrow, but who was now about to see fulfilled one of the dearest wishes of her long-tried heart. That first review in the *Daily News* so accidentally found was a good omen.

Other reviews quickly followed; none seen during that visit to Normandy, but read long afterwards.

"*East Lynne* is so interesting," said the *Saturday Review*, "that the interest begins with the beginning of the first volume and ends with the end of the third. The faults on which criticism fastens most naturally are all, or almost all, avoided. It is not spun out. It is not affected, or vulgar, or silly. It is full of a variety of characters, all touched off with point, finish, and felicity. It bears unmistakable signs of being written

by a woman, but it has many more of the excellencies than of the weaknesses of woman's writing."

In speaking of the legal portion of *East Lynne*, the *Saturday Review* remarked:—

"What is more wonderful is that the legal proceedings taken when the murder is finally discovered are all, or almost all, right. There is a trial, with its preliminary proceedings, and a real summing up, and a lively cross-examination. Mrs. Wood has an accuracy and method of legal knowledge about her which would do credit to many famous male novelists."

As already stated, Mrs. Henry Wood's legal knowledge was really extensive and accurate. The science and mystery of the Law had always possessed great charm and attraction for her. She followed out the points of any intricate case that might be going on with clearness and insight; in trials of mystery and complication quickly forming her opinion, which seldom proved wrong.

The *Saturday Review* continued:—

"The murder is not the main incident of the story. The chief place is reserved for the sorrows of an erring wife. The method of dealing with this theme is entirely Mrs. Wood's own, and shows very remarkable and unusual skill. . . . Evidently such a plot affords much scope for fine drawing of character and for powerful and effective scenes. In every one of the three parts of the story Mrs. Wood has been successful. She places before us a distinct picture of Lady Isabel as a young, ignorant, kind-hearted, charming girl, with a gentle spirit, although with ill-disciplined feelings and an utter want of worldly wisdom. In the second part Lady Isabel is not

made either too bad or too good. We cannot bring ourselves to condemn her very harshly, and yet the authoress never for a moment allows us to doubt of her abhorrence of such a crime. But the gem of this part is the character of Barbara Hare, who presents exactly the qualities which Lady Isabel wanted; who has strong sense and a right judgment, and an adoring love for her husband very different from the gentle flickering liking which Lady Isabel bestowed on the hero. The third part, however, must have been the most difficult to write, for it is all necessarily pathetic, and to sustain pathetic writing is a great tax on the powers of a story-teller. Considering the very great difficulty of the task, the success is undeniable. Few persons could read with dry eyes the scenes that pass between the despairing mother and the little dying boy to whom she may not reveal her love. And an achievement quite as great is the contrast that is preserved between the characters of the two wives brought into daily contact under such singular circumstances. Mrs. Henry Wood has quite avoided the fault of making Barbara too good. Although at the close of the story the whole of the Attorney's affections are most properly concentrated on his living wife, the reader is not sorry to be permitted to have a slight preference for the dead one."

"*East Lynne* is so full of incident, so exciting in every page, and so admirably written, that one hardly knows how to go to bed without reading to the very last page," said the *Observer*. . . . The trial scene is well depicted. There are no inconsistencies of time and place to shock the intelligent reader, such as most novels are full of; and you rise from its perusal

with satisfaction, feeling that the same events might reasonably have been expected to arise under similar circumstances."

"*East Lynne* is touching, well-intentioned, and written in the highest tone of morality and earnestness," said the *Morning Post*. "It is a strong appeal to women by a woman, who would urge upon her fellows the invincible truth that only the ways of wisdom are those of pleasantness, and only her paths are those of peace. . . . Mrs. Henry Wood has selected a difficult subject for a novelist whose aim is higher than that of merely providing amusement and producing excitement. To create compassion for the sinner, and to avoid sympathy with the sin; to strip the abandonment of rectitude and the dereliction from principle of all their romance; to invest them with their harshest reality, and to enforce the lesson of the hopelessly inevitable punishment which is in, and by, and through the breach of the most sacred law of God and the most binding obligations of society—are responsible and onerous tasks which the writer of *East Lynne* has executed well and faithfully."

"Miss Cornelia Carlyle," said the *Press*, "is one of the most laughable elderly ladies in the whole realm of fiction."

"Nothing strikes the reader of *East Lynne* more than the extraordinary manner in which the mystery of each part of the plot is preserved," said the late Mr. Hamilton Hume, the nephew of Hume the historian, in the *Conservative*—a paper that, in spite of admirable editing, was destined to a brief existence. "As the reader feels that he is moving in the different parts of the drama, and unconsciously feels himself deeply interested in its several characters, he almost trembles as each dangerous turning-point of the story is passed. *East*

Lynne, we may truly say, is no ordinary novel. A high tone of morality, a remarkable discrimination of human character, and a keen perception of the manners and customs of the age, are marks by which it is especially distinguished, and form some clue to solve the mystery of its warm and greedy reception at the hands of the reading public. . . . Mrs. Henry Wood has served the interests of morality in holding up to society a mirror in which it may see itself exactly reflected. She probes deep, and does not, through any false prudery, gloss over its evils and only depict its brightest colours. The healthy sentiment and pure morality of Mrs. Henry Wood's work renders it particularly valuable at the present time. Now, when it is fashionable to live fast and loose; now, when those who take the lead in the most select circles do not frown down, but rather encourage, those little excesses which a former generation might gravely term sins; now, when the sanctities of domestic life are threatened, and associations hallowed by time are endangered, it is a matter of no small importance that the follies, the inanities, the vices of society should be so ably portrayed and so thrillingly denounced as we see them in *East Lynne*."

These are short extracts from a few of the many reviews that appeared at the time, almost written in the same spirit. It seems well to quote them, for they helped to establish the popularity of a work that for more than a quarter of a century has steadily increased. The thoughts and notices of that past generation have long been forgotten, but their influence remains.

We will quote one more extract—from the *Times*. It was

one of the last, and its effect was powerful and immediate. No sooner had it appeared than the libraries were besieged and Messrs. Spottiswoode, the Queen's Printers, had to work night and day upon new editions. It has been remarked that the two great reviews in the *Times*, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, have been those of *Adam Bede* and *East Lynne*. In the present day the condition of things has changed; the literary market bears no resemblance to that of five-and-twenty or thirty years ago—and *Adam Bede* appeared even before that period. A review in the *Times* in those days was rare, and it directed the whole English-speaking world to the work fortunate enough to gain its notice.

"In *East Lynne*," remarked the *Times*, "we admit the authoress to have achieved a considerable success, which has brought her into the very foremost rank of her class. The authoress," it went on to say, in the course of its very long review, "is really what the novelist now prefers to call himself —a moralist; and there is moral purpose in her portraits, as well as vivacity. There is great breadth and clearness in her delineations of character, and her range is extensive, including many types. There is one point on which we may speak with special emphasis, and that is her capacity to portray men—an accomplishment so rare on the part of lady-novelists that we do not at this moment recall any one who has exhibited it in equal degree. The two characters of Mr. Carlyle and the second Lord Mount Severn are the principal examples of this rare capacity. Mount Severn is indicated with very few touches, and yet we have a portrait worthy the best of his class, like the faces which look upon us from the canvas of Vandyke.

Carlyle's is a more elaborated performance, and its harmony is preserved, in spite of its elaboration and of the many trying tests to which it is put in the progress of the story. His character is consistent with the serious preoccupations which render him so unobservant of the love of Barbara, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, of the jealousy and suffering of his wife. He errs, but it is the error of a manly nature assailed by difficulties which a more frivolous person would have anticipated. But in dealing with his difficulties, when they do come, his conduct is admirable. It is rarely that we find a hero so consistently heroic, so sensible and just, and yet so lovable. There is a strength in his character, as presented to the reader, which makes him forget the balance of qualities required for its conception on the part of the author. Let us add that it is not only a masterly portrait, but a conception of which even a moralist may be proud: a brave, noble, and truthful gentleman, without the pretence of being a paragon for the humiliation of his species.

"On the other hand, if we take the circle of characters in which authoresses generally most excel, we shall find the authoress here is equally skilful: that is to say, in analysing the motives and emotions of her own sex. She presents us to a little group of interesting women, each well-defined and judiciously contrasted in their relations to the story—its course and conclusion. Miss Corny is remarkably good, and so is Barbara Hare. So also are Afy Hallijohn and her sister Joyce. Isabel is less marked; but then she is the instrument on which the pathos of the story is strung: she is tossed hither and thither, and is but a frail reed for such a weight of woe and

misadventure. The reader cannot fail to take an interest in her fate, nor to be satisfied with the demeanour of her husband on her death-bed. The feelings of the latter are just indicated to the point to which analysis may fairly go, and then the authoress retires with a wise and decorous reticence. Balzac would have gone further, and would have handled and squeezed each throbbing heart-string, as his manner was in making his morbid preparations. But our authoress has better tact and a chaster purpose; nor does she affect to fathom the very gulf of human frailty. In short, she evinces the tact of a gentlewoman, even in the passages where less equable and chastened temperaments have a natural tendency to literary hysterics. The death-bed of Lady Isabel's child is an example of this self-command; where the child is represented as asking a child's questions under circumstances where others would have made him a precocious angel, and where the announcement is also made to the mother, in her agony, that her secret is known to the faithful Joyce."

The *Times* then proceeded to give a long extract from the work, and concluded with a short sentence of high praise.

East Lynne at once became a great success. No one accepted it so quietly as the author; none could have worn her laurels more modestly. To say that she was not profoundly gratified would be to make her more than human, and this, perhaps, was one reason for her calmness. She had also been perfected through suffering, and the things of earth had lost much of their hold upon her. Again, she looked upon her talent as a responsibility, for which she would one day have to give an account: and it must be admitted that never

was gift more earnestly devoted to high aims. If Mrs. Henry Wood's desire was to interest and amuse—as it should be the end and aim of every novelist—she was no less anxious to hold up to her readers a true ideal of goodness and morality; the better side of human nature; the inevitable Divine law that as a man sows so he must reap: the certainty of retribution.

She was deeply affected by her success, but possessing the sensitiveness of genius, she decided never to read reviews. Whether favourable or unfavourable, their effect was unsatisfactory; and, after the criticisms upon *East Lynne*, they seldom came under her notice. One of the exceptions was in the first series of *Johnny Ludlow*. The book appeared anonymously, and the secret was well kept. No one knew or even guessed at the authorship. The whole press was full of praise for this unknown writer; gifts denied to Mrs. Henry Wood were found in *Johnny Ludlow;* and points for which Mrs. Wood had been blamed—such as the occasional introduction of an element of superstition into her stories—*Johnny Ludlow* was especially commended for. Time after time, as each review appeared, she would laugh and enjoy this reading about herself from, as it were, an outside point of view, often wondering that the secret was never suspected.

Time has proved that *East Lynne* was not to enjoy a mere passing success. The work is even more popular to-day than when it appeared. It has been translated into every known tongue, including Parsee and Hindustanee. Indian readers will gather a large circle of Hindoos around them, and read the book to them in their own tongue; seated upon the ground, the listeners rock themselves to and fro and

laugh and weep by turns. Some years ago one of the chief librarians in Madrid informed Mrs. Henry Wood, through Messrs. Richard Bentley and Son, that the most popular book on his shelves, original or translated, was *East Lynne*. Not very long ago it was translated into Welsh and brought out in a Welsh newspaper. It has been dramatised and played so often that, had the author received a small royalty from every representation, it was long since estimated that it would have returned to her no less a sum than a quarter of a million sterling; but she never received anything. Sometimes it has appeared on the same night at three different London theatres, and at many in the provinces, where it is always being played. In America for years it has been one of the most popular of their dramas, as *East Lynne* has been one of the most popular of their books; but from this also the author reaped no advantage. In the English colonies the sale of the various works increases steadily year by year. In France the story has been dramatised, and is frequently played in Paris and the provinces.

"I think *East Lynne* the most interesting book I ever read," said the late Lord Lyttelton to a mutual friend; "and I consider the chapter headed 'Alone for evermore' one of the finest and most pathetic chapters in the whole realm of English fiction." This from one who was admitted to be among the cleverest men in England, who had taken high honours at Cambridge and was bracketed with Dean Vaughan, was great praise.

"I am amazed at the power and interest of *East Lynne*," wrote Harriet Martineau to another friend; "I do not care how many murders or other crimes form the foundation of

plots, if they are to give us such stories as this. I wish I possessed a hundredth part of the author's imagination." She wrote very much to the same effect of *Verner's Pride*, a work which found great favour with her.

Mrs. Wood possessed also the gift of excelling equally in long or short stories, as Harrison Ainsworth was unwilling to admit: two powers not often combined. Our greater novelists have seldom written more than a *few* short stories; but Mrs. Wood, in addition to nearly forty long novels, must have written not less than from three to four hundred short stories, every one of them with a distinct and carefully-worked-out plot. Yet all was done by one without any physical power, who commenced her work at an age when many writers begin to think of laying down their pen, and whose life, from the day she began to work in earnest, was passed very much in the retirement of her study.

KING CHARLES'S HOUSE, WORCESTER.

CHAPTER XXII

"Far off thou art, but ever nigh;
I have thee still, and I rejoice;
I prosper, circled with thy voice;
I shall not lose thee though I die."

OLD HOUSES, WORCESTER.

MARY HOWITT said of Mrs. Henry Wood that like Lord Byron she awoke one morning and found herself famous. But although *East Lynne* had been out some time, and was already successful, it was the somewhat late review in the *Times* which really brought it under universal notice.

The day was a memorable one for the author. Mr. Henry Wood, devoted politician that he was, could scarcely have

breakfasted without the help of his beloved *Times*, and had taken up the paper. Parliament had not assembled, but was about to do so, and the bugle-call was already sounding to battle. The morning was clear and frosty, and the Norwood skies were blue and bright, though not with the blueness of those far-off southern skies which had once been Mrs. Wood's home.

Mr. Wood opened the *Times*, and for a moment politics and the money-market were forgotten, as, on the outer column of the page, in the most conspicuous portion of the paper, the words *East Lynne* in large type caught his eye, followed by a lengthened and appreciative notice. "The *Times* gives *East Lynne* a long review this morning," he remarked to his wife.

The flush of emotion passed over Mrs. Wood's face, but she made no other sign. She had wondered whether the *Times* would review it—hoped it would do so, knowing how much depended upon it, what it would mean for her. Yet when it came, she received it, as she did all things, very calmly and quietly. Her anxiety to see the notice must have been as great as the interest at stake; but she remained seated and asked no question until her husband, having read to the end, rose and handed her the paper.

"Forgive me," he then apologised; "I felt compelled to finish it, and fear I forgot that your interest must be even greater than my own." She quietly took the paper from his hand, and read to the end without remark.

In those days the *Times* reviewed only on the rarest occasions, and almost always favourably. Where one person

wrote when *East Lynne* was published, hundreds write now. As we have said, writers were then more confined to the few who felt within them the "sacred fire" of inspiration. It was supposed to be an inborn faculty, like the genius of the poet or the musician, and without that sacred call not to be attempted. It is now taken up as a profession, easily essayed, easily laid down. So there are many failures; and even those who persevere generally discover that the "seven years' apprenticeship" is no delusion, and nothing lasting is achieved without hard work.

With Mrs. Henry Wood success had been patiently waited and worked for not for seven years, but for ten years. For nearly ten years, when living abroad, she had written for Harrison Ainsworth, contributing short stories month by month to *Bentley's Miscellany* and Colburn's *New Monthly Magazine*, then the property of that popular author. The stories appeared anonymously, but attracted much attention, and in conjunction with the admirable essays and papers of William Francis Ainsworth, the novelist's cousin, kept the magazines from falling into oblivion. It is to be regretted that the essays of William Francis Ainsworth were not republished in a complete form, for they deserved far more than a mere passing reputation.

For many of those ten years Mrs. Wood wrote without remuneration, out of love for her work. Popular as the stories were, Mr. Ainsworth made no pecuniary return. At length she declared her unwillingness to continue these contributions month after month and year after year without acknowledgment, and the payment of a small yearly sum was

arranged; so small that the old agreement could scarcely be said to have altered.

William Francis Ainsworth was in great part editor of both magazines, and to him all Mrs. Wood's MSS. were forwarded, and most of the correspondence was carried on between them —letters that were ever very pleasant and cordial. Francis Ainsworth was a traveller, a gentleman, a man of wide sympathies; of a mental tone altogether different from his cousin, Harrison Ainsworth. His acquaintance with Mrs. Wood was almost limited to correspondence, for she was living abroad and he had ceased to travel. But on Mrs. Wood's rare visits to England she never failed to spend a day with Mr. and Mrs. Francis Ainsworth at Hammersmith; visits which always left behind them agreeable recollections. On these occasions Harrison Ainsworth, if in London—he was then living at Kemp Town—was generally also a guest.

Amongst the correspondence of Francis Ainsworth, in one of his old letters, the following passage occurs. It is dated in the fifties, nevertheless Mrs. Wood had already written for some years for both magazines. He had evidently just read her last contribution in MS., and the passage begins the letter:

"My dear Mrs. Wood—Whence comes this deep well of the imagination, that, the more you draw from it, the fresher and more sparkling becomes the pure water?"

This might be very true, but constantly to draw from this "deep well" was a strain even upon the most fertile imagination, and Mrs. Wood wrote more than once to Harrison Ainsworth to tell him so. Many, nay most, of these short stories contained

the germ of a long novel. But Harrison Ainsworth was relentless, and would never consent to the longer novel being written. At length the day came when Mrs. Wood grew firm and said she would write no more short stories. She had her way, and at once began *East Lynne.*

It is not easy to realise the tax upon mind and imagination of writing year after year twenty-four short stories, each complete in itself, and of doing this for nearly ten years before *East Lynne* was written. Then all the work that followed *East Lynne:* nearly forty novels; the *Johnny Ludlow* stories, which were continued for twenty years; the acknowledged work; the immense amount of anonymous literary work written in addition for the *Argosy*, never known, never to be known; everything requiring earnest care and thought; for we have said that, however light and easily read may be the novels of Mrs. Henry Wood, every one of them cost her immense reflection; every one was carefully and elaborately considered to the utmost of her ability. She always gave of her best, and nothing less satisfied herself. When all this is taken into account, it seems scarcely too much to say that few writers have possessed the gift of ideality in greater measure. As one recently wrote who has had experience above most literary men in England: "Who else but Scott could carry us through forty long novels so absorbingly that interest never flags and attention never wanders?"

Of her own works, Mrs. Henry Wood preferred *The Shadow of Ashlydyat,*[1] and thought it the most clever.

Many will be inclined to agree with her. It is perhaps the

[1] Pronounced Ash-*lyd'*-yat.

most thoughtful and metaphysical of all her books; and the interest is sustained by simple means. The only mystery in the book is the Shadow itself. The work almost entirely concerns the workings of the human heart and the motives which influence life and action. Again much of it is true, and Mrs. Wood knew well what she was doing; she wrote it with no uncertain pen, no wavering purpose. The career of George Godolphin; the heart-history of Maria; its sorrow and anguish and endurance; its sensitive fear and horror of the evils brought upon her — "afraid to walk through the streets unveiled"—suffering caused by the sins of others— herself only "a little lower than the angels"; keenly alive to right and wrong—the rights and wrongs of others especially; so upright and pure that she could not endure the slightest shadow of a suspicion to be cast upon her name and face the world—nay, could not and did not live under it: all this is painted with no hesitating hand.

Every word, every thought is true to life, and for many of her facts Mrs. Wood did not draw upon her imagination. Nowhere is a stronger picture given of the truth that the sin a man commits frequently affects others more than himself; for such natures as George Godolphin do not as a rule realise all the evil they do, and are not capable of the keenest reproaches of conscience. Remorse came to George Godolphin in a degree: "all his life henceforth a dreary and tenantless mansion, haunted by vain regrets and pallid sorrowful faces." But this was only when the last blow of all had been struck, and he had lost the sweetest of wives by his own careless neglect and thoughtless cruelty, all the trouble and

anguish he had brought upon her; and found himself in a new and lonely life, on the desolate shores of a foreign land; wife gone, brother gone, without companion, without fortune, without child, and Miss Charlotte Pain flourishing in England —as such sirens so often flourish to the end.

But much of Mrs. Henry Wood's heart was in such books as *The Channings*, *Roland Yorke*, and *Johnny Ludlow;* whilst *Mildred Arkell* and *St. Martin's Eve* were both great favourites with her. She thought *Lord Oakburn's Daughters* the most sensational of her works—as it is one of the most interesting; whilst few are more powerful than *George Canterbury's Will*, and few in their way perhaps so complete as *Mrs. Halliburton's Troubles*, or read so powerful a lesson.

No one took greater pleasure than herself in her own books. As the years went on she keenly enjoyed her own stories, and would re-read them every few years with as much interest as when they first appeared. Perhaps the only thing that gave her greater pleasure was to write them. For, as we have said, she lived amongst her characters, and sorrowed in taking leave of them as in parting with real friends. In the humorous parts laughter would often cause the pen to be laid down for the tears that flowed. There were tears of sorrow also; regret for the inevitable misfortunes, or it might be the death, of one or other of her characters. A keen sense of humour more often than not is accompanied by an equal sense of the pathetic. In a letter received soon after her death from her friend Canon M'Cormick, he begged that in whatever was written about her, justice might be done to this sense of humour. "Not only as

seen in her books, but as manifested in her life; the keenness and quickness with which she saw and appreciated the point of a good story."

One finds this in her works, and especially in *Johnny Ludlow*, where one is as quickly moved to tears as to laughter. It was so in life. She possessed in the highest degree a living interest in things and people, indicative of strong vital force as well as human sympathy; combined in her, as often in others, with great powers of observation. This interest in things and people extended itself to everything that concerned their welfare; to all social topics of the day. Seldom, however, did her pen take up the cause of such matters. She felt it was not her vocation, for these things often led to arguments, which she would never be drawn into. But if she departed from her rule, her insight into the curious workings of the human heart, her clear judgment went straight to the root of the matter. There sometimes came proof of this, and on two occasions they were nearly parallel cases.

The first was in connection with Colburn's *New Monthly Magazine.*

Mrs. Wood was at that time writing stories that touched upon certain religious topics and a danger that seemed threatening to England. The stories pointed out the subtle evil in question. After a time, a deputation interested in the evils exposed waited upon Mr. Francis Ainsworth and demanded the name of the author, promising untold retribution, beginning with Mr. Ainsworth himself, if the name were withheld. It was not given; and nothing happened, and Mr. Ainsworth is still living. But the incident caused both

author and editor much amusement and some lively correspondence: and was moreover a tribute to the truth and power of the stories.

The second occasion happened when *A Life's Secret* was passing through one of the magazines of the Religious Tract Society. This work touched upon the effects of Strikes and matters connected with them—movements then only commencing, but from which the author saw that danger might arise to the industry of the country and trouble to the working classes.

The dangers, by a series of dramatic incidents, were vividly portrayed in the course of the story, and those most concerned in the matter presently demanded the name of the writer who thus exposed and prophesied. The house in Paternoster Row was besieged and the windows were threatened. Again the name was withheld, and again house and windows were spared. This took place very many years ago, and many of the consequences foretold in *A Life's Secret* have become matters of history.

And as Mrs. Wood seldom took up a social subject, so she rarely wrote with a set purpose before her, though the contrary has occasionally been said. Two works, and two only, were written with a distinct purpose: *A Life's Secret* and *Danesbury House*—the latter even more than the former; for *A Life's Secret* was meant to amuse as well as to instruct, whilst the end and aim of *Danesbury House* is never lost sight of throughout the story.

The history of the latter was as follows. The Scottish Temperance League had advertised a prize for a story showing the evils of intemperance. An old and valued friend of the author, once Vicar of Great Malvern and Rector of

Falmouth, who had been domestic chaplain to the late Duke of Cambridge and spent many of his years at Court—one of Queen Adelaide's intimate friends—came to her one day, newspaper in hand.

"My dear Mrs. Wood," he said, "here is work that you can and must do. No one could write it so well, or preach so eloquent a sermon."

"You are paying me a great compliment," laughed Mrs. Wood, for a very great preacher stood before her.

"I assure you that I mean what I say," returned her friend. "What do you think of my suggestion?"

"I do not much like the idea of competing for a prize," was the reply. "Is there not a slight want of dignity in this sort of thing?"

"I fancied so too, at the first moment," returned the Rector. "But I now think you might dismiss that idea for the sake of the good you would do."

"You are taking too much for granted," said Mrs. Wood. "I might fail."

"My dear lady," was the retort, "if you compete for the prize and do not gain it, never believe in me again. I would stake my reputation upon your success."

"There is another difficulty in the way," said Mrs. Wood, after a moment's reflection. "This advertisement has been out some time. Scarcely a month remains of the date when MSS. must be sent in; I could not do it."

"I am sure that you could," persisted the Rector. "You have the pen of a ready writer, and, beginning at once, will accomplish the task." Then turning to her husband, whose

greatest friend he was, he added: "Won't you join your persuasions to mine in this matter?"

Mr. Wood laughed his usual quiet, easy laugh. "I never influence my wife in her writings," he replied. "She knows what to do so much better than I can tell her. If she competes, I have no doubt she will succeed; but if she feels disinclined to make the attempt, I would not urge it."

The difference between Mr. Wood and the Rector was this: the one, though a learned divine, was also full of imagination and delighted in works of that description; whilst the other believed that politics and abstruse books of science were the levers on which the world should move. Everything else was lightly esteemed, and above all things works of fiction.

But the Rector gained his point. He so persuaded Mrs. Wood that she agreed to make the trial. She began the work at once, threw her heart into the subject, of which she recognised the importance, and for which her mind was even then full of material. Much, very much, of *Danesbury House* is true. In twenty-eight days the work was completed and sent off; an instance of very rapid writing, for a portion of that twenty-eight days had to be devoted to the plot.

In due time Mrs. Wood, as the Rector had predicted, was successful. But from a pecuniary point of view it would have been better to have failed. She received the sum of one hundred pounds for a work which has sold by hundreds of thousands. And when, some years after, unknown to her, this same friend and Rector wrote to the Scottish Temperance League and said that he considered a further

honorarium was due to the author of a success beyond their dreams, and a harvest never anticipated, the directors briefly replied that "they must decline making any further acknowledgment to the author of *Danesbury House*, as it would establish a precedent."

The circumstance when related to Mrs. Wood caused her some pain: a little from this proof of want of appreciation on the part of the League; but much more that the request should have been made. For no one ever cared less for the intrinsic merit of wealth, whilst duly measuring its necessity. The love of money was never hers. Even if she felt that she had met with less than justice at the hands of any, it was soon forgotten. If occasionally remonstrated with for too great leniency, there ever came the reply: "It will be all right in the end." When *East Lynne* had appeared, Harrison Ainsworth wrote and said: "I suppose now I shall never have another work from your pen." And she replied with the singleness of purpose that was part of herself: "Yes, I will write you one more book." This was *The Shadow of Ashlydyat*. Harrison Ainsworth was charmed, thinking the title one of the best and most effective he had ever heard. For a moment Mrs. Wood had hesitated between this title and *Lady Godolphin's Folly*, though much preferring the one she adopted. But its rhythm depends on the accent being laid upon the penultimate syllable of *Ashlydyat;* dividing the name into three syllables only. It may be said that Mrs. Wood gave away the serial rights for which she received £60, and for which rights about the same time she was offered £1000. Perhaps it was greater generosity than Harrison

Ainsworth deserved, though circumstances more than nature may have caused him to be the reverse of generous; but we have seen that Mrs. Wood was never of the world, worldly.

The allusions to *Danesbury House* bring to mind how it has been sometimes remarked that the author of that work, a temperance story, ought to have been herself an abstainer from wine. But though *Danesbury House* is certainly a temperance story, it does not advocate universal abstinence. This Mrs. Wood only thought necessary in certain cases. If there were people in the world who, like Dr. Johnson, could abstain but could not be moderate, for such there was only one thing to be done. There must be no hesitation or half measures. This is strictly laid down in *Danesbury House;* no other way of escape is suggested.

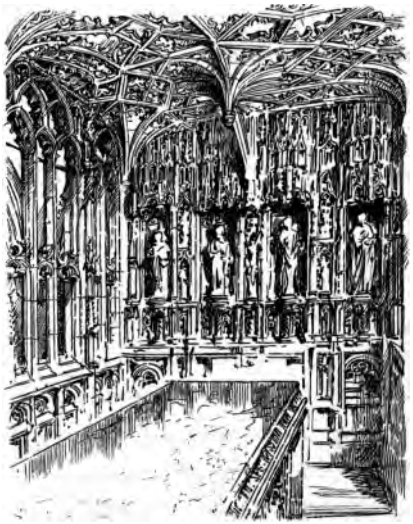
For those not so unfortunately constituted she saw, on the contrary, more virtue in moderation than in total abstinence, and this she practised. Whilst laying down strict rules of self-discipline, she was large-minded for others, believing that "all things are given us richly to enjoy," though in the spirit of discretion. Not hers the contracted nature of the ascetic, but the broad views of the philanthropist. All the troubles of the world could never have driven her to the cloister with its narrowing tendencies. Petty rules and ceremonials formed no part of her creed, but the state of the heart. Into her religion she carried her simple doctrine. To one ever self-denying, exceptional seasons of penance seemed a work of supererogation, which might presently be looked upon as a sacrifice and meritorious; whispering, "Peace, peace," when there was no peace. In all such things there was the inevitable

danger of substituting the ceremonial for the spiritual. Yet she never belonged to the extreme Low Church Party. As a girl she had attended the good old-fashioned High Church services of the Cathedral, where all things were done with simple grandeur and dignity; and in such services she joined heart and soul. She had mixed with the old-fashioned dignitaries, and her love for them and their ways was too deep-rooted for any change. But the services of those days and of these are widely separated. For her religious views Mrs. Wood went to the New Testament, and what she did not find there she would not believe and dared not advocate. Her convictions were unchangeable, for she ever placed before her one EXAMPLE whereon she rested. Arguments and dogmas she avoided, leading others insensibly by the strongest of all influences—the unerring force of a consistent life.

LITTLE MALVERN.

CHAPTER XXIII

"And thou art worthy; full of power;
As gentle; liberal-minded, great,
Consistent; wearing all that weight
Of learning lightly like a flower."



PRINCE ARTHUR'S CHANTRY, WORCESTER CATHEDRAL.

No record of Mrs. Henry Wood would be complete without some mention of *Johnny Ludlow*, one of her chief and favourite characters.

Johnny Ludlow may be said to have been Mrs. Wood's companion, continually in her thoughts, and very much in her heart, during all the latter portion of her life; for the papers extended over a period of twenty years.

Whilst most of her other books were being written, *Johnny Ludlow* was constantly going on, and month after month some fresh story was being woven of which he was the hero and centre. The stories came to her without the slightest effort, and it gave her the greatest pleasure to write them. Had she lived for another twenty years, *Johnny Ludlow* could never have quite ceased, though perhaps only appearing at longer intervals. For he had become part of her life; a reality; endowed with existence; and she could no more have placed *finis* at the end of any one paper than she could have signed the death-warrant of a personal friend. Altogether she must have written considerably over a hundred *Johnny Ludlow* papers, reckoning each monthly part as a story; and every separate part had its own special plot or drama. But the stories were of various lengths; some completing themselves in one number, others passing into two, three, or even more numbers. The two longest were the two last: *Featherstone's Story*, that tragedy at the Maison Rouge, so much of which is actual fact; and *The Silent Chimes.*

It is true that towards the end, when so many stories had appeared, and *Johnny Ludlow* had gone through a multiplicity of experiences, she found it more difficult to invent plots and situations, and to keep up the air of realism which had to be preserved. The same thread had to be visible in all; Johnny Ludlow himself must always be in evidence. Nevertheless that fertile imagination, that, as Francis Ainsworth had remarked years before, was an inexhaustible well whose waters grew sweeter the more you drew from it, would certainly never have ceased weaving plots and dramas, comedies and tragedies,

of which Johnny Ludlow held the key. The ease with which they were written must have added to the author's enjoyment, as it does to the reader's.

When Mrs. Wood first began to write *Johnny Ludlow*, she had no idea to what dimensions the work would grow. The first stories, originally designed as short papers for the *Argosy*, immediately became so popular that there was no resource but to go on with them. This was no trouble, but a great delight, which only increased as *Johnny Ludlow* and all his surroundings gradually took form and existence. Presently the author found herself in the midst of a crowd of early friends, scenes, and recollections arising as it were from a long-closed cavern of memory. Voices long silent awoke, faces long unseen revived; many a lost echo, many a village street and country lane must have once more haunted her in these *Johnny Ludlow* days.

To prove the truth and reality of these memories, and their effect upon others, we cannot forbear quoting from an article which appeared a little time ago upon Mrs. Henry Wood as the writer of *Johnny Ludlow*.

It is so exact a picture of Worcester and Worcestershire, the tone is so earnest, its quiet testimony so thorough, that it deserves a less ephemeral record than the pages of a magazine. The unknown author had evidently studied her subject carefully and conscientiously, and drawn her conclusions amidst the very places and influences, the very same condition of people described in the stories.

"Writing of her first stay in London," observes the writer

of this article, "an American author said that her greatest pleasure lay not in the associations of celebrated persons and events in real life, but in the connection of the characters and incidents of her favourite author with the places and scenes she visited.

"Something of this feeling is, no doubt, experienced by most imaginative and impressionable persons in a neighbourhood or town endeared to them as the scene of favourite books. It would be a great advantage in many ways if every novelist of note would, in his writings, 'work up' the county or town with which he is most familiar. What an interesting and valuable picture of the varied phases of life, of which our little island is the scene, would be presented to a reader if there were a novelist to do for every county what Mrs. Henry Wood has done for Worcestershire!

"Whilst the latter has not confined herself exclusively to the one county in her writings, many of her books were all localised in the Faithful City or its shire.

"There are few towns in England which can surpass Worcester for historic and antiquarian interests; but as I drive down the Tything, and the Cross, and along dear old High Street, on my occasional visits, for me the celebrities of real life have a very hazy existence; but I always feel that Squire Todhetley, accompanied by Tod and Johnny, is driving Bob and Blister in front of me, and if I put up at the 'Star and Garter' I shall surely see them. When the college boys come clattering through the Close at dinner-time, and tear off to their respective homes, I can see the young Channings and Yorkes, the Halliburtons and Sankers amongst them, and I always

look out specially for dear Stephen Bywater. Many a time I have had lunch at the confectioner's in High Street from which Toby Sanker used to buy the penny pork pies for the improvised dinners of that ill-regulated household.

"I often walk round the Close, trying to fix on the Channings' house, and, in fancy, hear Roland Yorke's tremendous peals on the bell. Here is the scene of the tragedy with which the book bearing his name opens; and I never stand at the wall to the west of the beautiful Cathedral, below which the river winds its lovely course, without thinking of the mischievous college boys mounted thereon, throwing poor old Ketch's keys into the swift-flowing water. The sight of a barge floating along brings to mind poor Charley Channing and his misadventure—a true incident, which we believe really occurred many years ago in the city.

"One might continue such recollections indefinitely, so completely is the whole city incorporated with one or other of Mrs. Henry Wood's tales; but I wish specially to refer here to the charge occasionally brought against her of improbability in her plots and incidents, a charge which, in my opinion, is utterly unfounded.

"In general, all elderly persons, at all events, must have learned, by life's experience, that truth is stranger than fiction, and that it would be almost impossible for a novelist to invent more improbable things than the happenings of real life; and in particular, I have it on excellent authority, that our authoress had a most remarkable experience of life and people, and never invented a single plot that had not in it a substratum of truth: truth and fiction being cunningly blended together; as

it is in the works of all our greatest novelists, from Scott downwards. And often it will be found that the most improbable incidents are those drawn, not from imagination but from fact. Though quite unacquainted with Mrs. Henry Wood, and only coming to reside in her county after her death, I have myself met with several exactly parallel cases to some of her incidents.

"The tales which fill the several volumes of the *Johnny Ludlow* series are made up of very simple material; the charm and fascination which they have for their thousands of readers being in the manner of writing, and the accurate pictures of country life and people which they present—pictures as true and distinct as photographs, and which every one feels must have been drawn direct from nature.

"Some great man has said that every person's life is worth writing, and would be interesting if written well; and certainly every small town with the adjacent country can furnish abundant material for such a work as *Johnny Ludlow*, if only it numbered amongst its inhabitants a literary 'witch' who, like Mrs. Henry Wood, would 'make these dry bones live' by the mere force of her genius. But these 'witches' are only born once in a century.

"But interesting as her pictures of Worcester are, it is in her delineation of the rural life of the county that one who has lived there can appreciate best Mrs. Henry Wood's thorough acquaintance with her subject, and her power of presenting it to others. She has been charged with 'unnaturalness' in the language and speech of her country-folk; I have heard people

say that they were sure that no such dialect could be found in England, and I confess that until I lived amongst them I was also doubtful.

"But a few months' acquaintance with the uncouth dialect, and curious, grating accent peculiar to this county, convinced me that on this point, more, perhaps, than on any other, Mrs. Henry Wood distinctly knew her work. In real life, as in her novels, these people seem to try how awkwardly they can word their sentences, and how often they can substitute the objective or possessive case for the nominative, and *vice versa;* and how narrow a limit they can put to their verb conjugations. A man will say, 'Now, Tom, let we have us dinners.' *Be* is generally used for *am* and *are*, and *have* for *has*, while for *have* proper we hear *haves*.

"The scenes of a great portion of *Johnny Ludlow's* tales are laid in that part of the county which lies between the city and the Lickey Hills, the Severn and the county boundary; Crabb Cot lying just on the dividing line of Worcestershire and Warwickshire.

"In this area we find some of the prettiest villages, quaintest little towns, and most unspoiled phases of country life that the midland counties can offer. More charming villages than Clent, Hagley, or Ombersley (the scene of Bill Whitney's hunting accident), it would be hard to find; and wandering on a bright summer's morning down the little streets, past their quiet churches and pretty creeper-covered houses and cottages, one feels that one has indeed alighted on the originals of the lovely village which figures under so many different names in the books under discussion.

"Worcestershire is remarkable for the number and variety of its country seats and beautiful half-timbered houses.

"It is impossible to go far in any direction without meeting with some of the former, of which we find specimens of every description and grade, from the stately old castle and its modern imitation, to the rambling Tudor or Jacobean farm-house of the well-to-do yeomen, a class of people of sterling worth, well represented in this county, and for whom Mrs. Wood seems to have entertained much respect, recognising and delineating them as the keystone of agricultural prosperity. We meet with them again and again in her books; the family of Coney in *Johnny Ludlow* being an excellent example. It is with such families that I am best acquainted; and in exactly such a farmhouse as she has often depicted (that in *Dene Hollow*, for instance) I am writing these lines.

"This class is frequently the equal of the less wealthy portion of the landed gentry in education, breeding, manner of life, and wealth (in this respect, indeed, they often have the advantage), the difference being that they rent instead of own their land, and generally their houses too. The homesteads are handed down from generation to generation, in some cases for hundreds of years, and they are as dear to the occupants as if they were their own possessions.

"The house in which I am now living is like the family, a typical one of its class, and was built by an ancestor near the site of the original one; and a good deal of the old brick and timber having been used again, it presents a much more antique appearance than it can really lay claim to. The polished oak landing and stairs look strangely out of keeping

WORCESTER.

LAST WORDS WRITTEN BY MRS. HENRY WOOD.

And those unfortunate chimes have nearly passed out of Memory with the lapse of years. By chance "Silent Chimes" they are always called when allusion is made to them, and will be so called for ever.

Johnny Ludlow.

with the red quarried hall-floor; but in the wide whitewashed kitchen (evidently built in the days when eight or ten men and women farm-hands sat down every day to share in the contents of the huge baking-oven) everything is in harmony, from the great open fireplace, where one can sit in the chimney-corner and watch the smoke ascend straight up towards the sky, to the half-circular oak screen or settle, and vast oak sideboard with its array of cider jugs and cups.

"To speak of Worcestershire without mentioning cider would certainly be to describe the play of *Hamlet* with the part of Hamlet left out.

"What would the dwellers in a non-cider-drinking county say to the cellars of this house having contained at one time forty hogsheads, each of 100-gallon capacity, and two of 200-gallon, all filled with that delectable beverage one autumn, and emptied before the next?

"Yet such is a fact; and when one has seen a little of the habits of the people, it ceases to be a wonder. Summer and winter, day and night, beginning directly after breakfast, the cider is always flowing, and it is a matter of the barest civility to offer a jugful to every one who passes through one's yard. But if you wish to see it in *full* flow, just be about the yard on hunt days, when there is a 'find' or a 'kill' near the house.

"Every man, whether he be acquainted with the master of the place or not, by virtue of that freemasonry which seems to exist alike amongst hunting men and cider-drinkers, crowds into the yard or garden, and has a good pull at the fine old Worcester mugs and loving cups, which are refilled as fast as emptied from the buckets brought up out of the cellar!

"One finds not only excellent old furniture, but exquisite antique china and silver in common use amongst these people. I see on the tables, every day, tea-sets and silver-ware which *nouveaux riches* and curiosity-mongers would gladly buy for drawing-room ornaments.

"I do not recollect that Mrs. Henry Wood dwells much on scenery in her novels, excepting in so far as it is necessary to the working out or setting of a story—'word-painting' had not become the fashion in the days when her style was formed,—but what descriptions she does give us are very clear-cut and distinct, and generally intensely Worcestershire.

"If I were asked to describe one or two typical bits of the scenery of this county, I could not do better than refer the questioner to the pictures of his home, in the tale of *Francis Radcliffe*, for one kind, and to the opening chapters of *Trevlyn Hold* for another. The 'setting' of *Dene Hollow* and *The Shadow of Ashlydyat* is also singularly good; and with the neighbourhood of the latter I am well acquainted. But the old, old house surrounded by lofty elms, with their hundreds of cawing rooks, that formed 'Selina Radcliffe's home,' is as truly a photograph from nature as any that was ever taken; and one only fails to localise it exactly because the counterpart is met with so many times in dear, pretty Worcestershire.

"Mrs. Henry Wood has indeed conferred a distinction upon her county, which can never be too thoroughly recognised or too greatly appreciated. S. M. C."

Every word here bears directly upon the subject, and testifies to the fidelity of the stories. The article seems to

bring *Johnny Ludlow* and all his surroundings still more vividly before us; to lift him still more into the realms of actual existence; it is the impartial testimony of an eye-witness, who has studied the matter on the very spot, and decided that people and places, manners and customs of Worcestershire life—from the impulsive squire, and homely, true-hearted Sir John, to Miss Timmens, the village schoolmistress, and Lee, the humble postman—are all true pictures of the life described.

As the stories appeared from time to time, the secret of their authorship was well kept; the slightest whisper never transpired. Friends would occasionally say to her: "Mrs. Wood, who *is* the author of *Johnny Ludlow*?" And she would laugh and reply: "That is a secret that will no doubt some day be known"; and none suspected that the writer stood before them.

The stories had been appearing for some years when a certain number of them were gathered into book form, and published anonymously as a First Series. The press received the book with the highest praise, some critics declaring they had not suspected the existence of a writer of so much power, none imagining for a moment that they referred to the author of *East Lynne.*

But the mystery caused various people to claim the authorship. Amongst these was one who, in the course of a trial at a fashionable watering-place, declared upon oath that he was the writer of *Johnny Ludlow.* This could not be treated as a mere dishonest boast. The lawyers conducting the case were communicated with, and the author of the assertion had publicly to retract his statement. He wrote to the papers

declaring that what he had said was untrue, and that he had never written one line of *Johnny Ludlow*. At the same time he sent a letter to the still unknown author, through Messrs. Bentley and Son, begging for mercy—which he received.

We may cite these *Johnny Ludlow* papers as another proof of Mrs. Wood's fertility of invention. For twenty years they appeared in rapid succession. The tax upon the inventive powers necessarily grew greater as the stories multiplied. Yet to the end there was no falling off in vigour and freshness. *Caramel Cottage*, one of the last, is also one of the best. The stories form a crowd and company of living people, standing out separately and distinctly each from the other. Six volumes in all, equal in length to six novels, five of which have appeared.

We can quite realise how Mrs. Wood delighted in this work. The scene was laid in her favourite county—her own county—Worcestershire. Every place she describes, every house and village, every highway and by-way, every country sound, had been impressed upon her memory in childhood; the whole neighbourhood—an immense area—had entwined itself round her heart-strings. It also bears witness to her powers of memory. Very much of three counties is described with a minuteness almost bewildering; yet when the last *Johnny Ludlow* was written, more than half a century had gone by since Mrs. Wood had seen the places delineated.

With her characters it is less surprising. We forget places, but we do not forget our friends. To write of *Johnny Ludlow* was to go back to her early youth and restore friends and acquaintances from the dead. Some of course are imaginary,

but many were portraits of people who had once lived and moved and had their being. If her pleasure was great, it must often have been bitter-sweet. Sir John and Lady Whitney, the Squire and Mrs. Todhetley, and a host of others —she had known them all intimately in days of old. To endow them as it were with a second life must have had in it something of the pain we experience in burning old letters. In the flames we see rising dead-and-gone faces—thoughts—episodes. It is a funeral pyre, of which our hearts are the victims. When the last flame has expired, and the ashes lie smouldering like so many of our dead hopes, we realise that the charm of life is over. Then is it "good-bye to youth," as the Austrian Emperor remarked on his fiftieth birthday; and that means good-bye to all the glamour of existence; very much of it illusion no doubt, but a fool's paradise in which we have fondly lingered, and would linger still.

Yet the pleasure of writing *Johnny Ludlow* seemed to grow greater, not to diminish. And the brain never failed. It was loss of physical power that at last caused the pen to fall from the hand.

We have spoken of one who either personated Mrs. Wood, or took credit for her works. Others had occasionally done the same thing, though less publicly. Once, many years ago, a lady, Mrs. C——, came to Mrs. Wood in great distress. The previous day an acquaintance, not knowing her to be Mrs. Wood's friend, declared that she had written every one of Mrs. Wood's books. "Of course I knew it to be impossible, but I was obliged to come and tell you," exclaimed Mrs. C——, impulsively shedding tears. Mrs. Wood, on

the contrary, only met it with her quiet smile, declaring that such assertions could harm none but those who spoke them. On another occasion a person well known to Mrs. Wood was taking a common friend in to dinner at a country-house in Shropshire. Again unaware that the lady upon his arm was also acquainted with Mrs. Wood, he boldly declared that he did most of the editing of the *Argosy*, and had written quite half Mrs. Wood's works. This gentleman, now in holy orders and a country vicar, has no doubt repented the error of his ways. On yet another occasion, Mrs. Henry Wood's daughter was at a ball at the late Sir William Walker's, when her host brought up and introduced a gentleman for the next dance. At the same time he made some flattering allusion to the author of *East Lynne*. When the dance was over, the young man went gravely up to Sir William and said: "That young lady cannot be genuine, or there is some mistake. She is not Mrs. Henry Wood's daughter at all. I know the author of *East Lynne* intimately. She lives near my home in the country, and we often meet. This young lady lives in London, and, I see plainly, knows nothing about the real Mrs. Henry Wood."

Sir William, a little annoyed and a little amused, replied: "I assure you, sir, that whoever your Mrs. Henry Wood may be, she is not the author of *East Lynne*, who is my personal friend. And, further, allow me to say that the young lady with whom you have just had the honour of dancing is not here to-night as my guest under false colours." Then leaving the young man in a state of unhappy perplexity, he went up to Miss Wood, and with much humour narrated the

incident, laughingly advising her to enter an action for slander against her late partner.

Whilst mentioning mistakes and impositions, a bold one may be recorded. On this occasion it was not personating the writer or taking credit for authorship, but reproducing the work itself. Messrs. Savill and Edwards, who were blameless in the matter, were printing a penny weekly paper, which was being issued from some house in the Strand. A writer, whose name was well known, conceived the idea of taking *East Lynne* and bringing it out in this penny paper. Printers, proprietors, and editors knew nothing of the fraud. The title of the book was changed, and the name of every character; with that exception the text was word for word *East Lynne.* But the fraud was discovered, and Mrs. Wood's solicitors wrote to Messrs. Savill and Edwards stating that if the story were not at once stopped, an injunction would be applied for. Not only was this done, but after that week the paper never appeared again. The title which replaced *East Lynne* was *How could she do it?* by the author of *The Black Angel;* and perhaps the author of *The Black Angel* had not to search very far for his hero.

A pleasanter coincidence than this had happened years before.

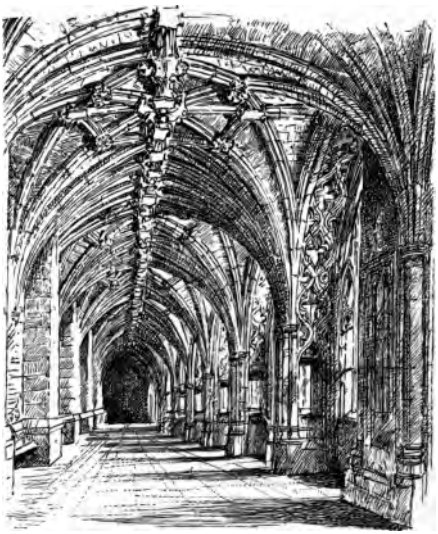
On one occasion, when living abroad, Mr. and Mrs. Wood had come over on a visit to England, and were staying at a private hotel in Dover Street, Piccadilly, where they made the acquaintance of some charming people; a gentleman and his wife who were staying there at the same time. At this period Mrs. Wood was writing a series of letters called *Ensign Tom*

Pepper's Letters from the Seat of War, supposed to be written by a young officer in the Crimea. One morning the lady in question mentioned to Mrs. Wood that her husband had gone out for a magazine. "He is deeply interested in some letters that are appearing in *Colburn's New Monthly*," she said, "and can scarcely wait patiently from one month to another. *We are both certain they are genuine*," she emphatically added. Mrs. Wood, who seldom spoke of her writings to her most intimate friends, and never at all to strangers, could not help laughing at the singular situation, and in the impulse of the moment betrayed herself; and great was their astonishment at finding that the author of those masculine and realistic letters was none other than the calm and gentle lady whose acquaintance they had so recently made. This incident took place some forty years ago.

OMBERSLEY.

CHAPTER XXIV

"And hear at times a sentinel
Who moves about from place to place,
And whispers to the worlds of space,
In the deep night, that all is well."



CLOISTERS, WORCESTER CATHEDRAL.

WE have given an extract from an unknown critic upon *Johnny Ludlow*, and venture upon another short analysis of some of Mrs. Henry Wood's other works, by one of the ablest critics of the day.

We do so because Dr. Japp, with keen perception of a writer's thoughts and motives, the mental idiosyncrasy which must inevitably lead to certain given results in given writers, seems to enter into

and understand Mrs. Wood's power and individuality more accurately than many, and to have bestowed much thought upon the matter.

The article, which appeared in the pages of a periodical, does not pretend to be exhaustive, or to go profoundly and elaborately into the whole list of works, or to touch completely even upon any one of them. But as far as it does go it is true and appreciative, and suggestive; placing certain thoughts and problems before the reader and allowing him to work out the argument for himself. This surely is one of the true ends of reviewing, which should be based upon broad principles, and include every side of an author's merits as well as defects. The inevitable tendency of criticism is to search for and dwell upon shortcomings, but Dr. Japp's criticisms are broad and generous, and if he does not spare the flaws in a writer, neither does he withhold praise; so striking a just balance.

"There are fashions in books as there are fashions in dress," remarks the article in question. "We are sometimes inclined to wonder nowadays at the tastes and the patience of our ancestors, who would pore with delight over the somewhat tedious epistolary pages of Richardson, or even over the more concentrated passages of Jane Austen, to which her keen knowledge of character and motive within a widened range imparted new accesses of interest. Yet it is not too much to say that probably the readers of the end of next century will wonder as much at some of our predilections.

"The truth is that, just as the sciences oscillate, so do tastes and appetites, even in the refined sphere of literature of

the fictitious kind. One school overdoes its speciality, and people get sated and demand an indulgence in the very opposite. And so the pendulum swings. Sometimes all the rage is for realism, and the realists out-Herod Herod; and then once more comes in fantasy, extravagance, and all manner of caprices and eccentricities.

"We owe something to the writers who manage to unite the two tendencies, and as it were stand on the happy mean, and secure permanence, combining realistic and faithful portraiture with invention and incident, mystery, surprise, and sensation; imparting new interests to everyday affairs; and who, while catching hold of the sublime, ethical principles that penetrate all life, manage to invent as well as to represent, and so reveal to us the very spirit and secret meaning of the life amid which we move.

"These are the writers who have the most chance to live. Mr. Anthony Trollope was a great photographer, but he sometimes lacked invention as he lacked *Ethos*, and it told upon his books, as it is likely to tell upon their permanent hold. Mr. Charles Reade sometimes overdid the *Ethos*, and was besides too egotistical and too little dramatic, however dramatic he was in style and form; and he is likely to lose considerably with the future on this score. George Eliot was a very great artist, but she too was over-reflective, and despised a little what is ordinarily called action or movement.

"Mrs. Henry Wood combined in a remarkable degree these two powers or qualities—realistic portraitures of men and women, with invention, construction, and surprises. She successfully used sensational elements for moral ends, and so

at the most fitting moment met a great need and corrected a vicious tendency, hardly otherwise corrigible. It is because we believe her remarkable merits and services in this regard have hardly yet had full recognition—her invention, as seen in some of her less successful works, having been dwelt on too much to the exclusion of those in which both elements were happily united—that we would endeavour to justify the position we would thus claim for her as novelist, the best of whose work has not only been a source of delight and elevation to the present generation, but is likely to hold its place for many generations to come.

"It is one of the highest proofs of creative power that the artist can afford to wait—to let the characters develop themselves. 'Raw haste, half-sister to delay,' is just as ruinous here as in matters of practical conduct.

"So much is this a *sine qua non* in fiction that a 'retarding element' is often introduced, and indeed sought for and desiderated by the critics, which is, at the best, simply a kind of artificial expedient to supply the place of the other—an attempt to make mere trick of artificial construction do the work of insight into life and its morale.

"One of the true tests of success is the sense of sympathy and toleration—the power of impressing the reader with a complete belief in the reality of the characters on the author's part, as though they had been lived with, observed, patiently 'put-up-with,' and had sometimes amused, and sometimes vexed and irritated.

"The result is that they affect you precisely as the author feels that they affected her. This implies a close attention to

the minutest details of conduct, habit, and idiosyncrasy. This gave the sense of reality to Jane Austen and Miss Ferrier: it also gives force and attraction to the stories of Mrs. Henry Wood.

"But in her case you find also a new order of agencies brought into play.

"She is apt at incident, situation, and sensational surprise. Her plots are completely thought out—very seldom do loose threads appear; and yet in the most successful and popular of her novels there is no sense of inharmoniousness. The characters are caught up, involved in the most unexpected circumstances of mystery and crime; but each retains the dominant characteristic, only modified, it may be, as to its energy and the manner of expression.

"In *Lady Adelaide*, for instance, we see all this; and the effects of the burden of a secret on the human heart, with no pretence of casuistry, is revealed. So too in *The Red Court Farm*, and *The Master of Greylands*, where evil traffic persisted in leaves effects not only on those innocently involved in its coils, but also on those who, having once committed themselves to an unworthy course of action, found to their cost that the ends they had purposed were defeated by the very means taken secretly to secure them.

"And yet, in the midst of all this, we have a group of persons as truly real as those we meet with every day.

"In *The Master of Greylands* we have the querulous, exacting mistress, the tomboy Flora, who sets the house by the ears, and Ethel Reeve, so sweet, patient, and confiding, and Mr. North whose courtship of Ethel is the most natural conceivable

—not to mention the worthy pair, so well contrasted in temper and ways, Mr. and Mrs. Bent, at the inn.

"Miss Castlemaine, too, who becomes head of the Grey Sisters, and at the last refuses the weak-kneed fellow who allowed her father to separate them and to choose a wife for him, and this though he had now become a baronet—Sir William Blake-Gordon, and a most tempting *parti*. But you feel that Mary Ursula is exactly the woman who, having once chosen such a work, would stick to it—having put her hand to the plough, would not turn back.

"Not seldom the very absence of all conscious artistic elaboration aids the effects of reality and truth, which it is the business of the novelist to secure; and the immense and lasting success of Mrs. Henry Wood's novels demonstrates this in face of the superfine and captious criticism of which she has occasionally been the subject.

"In opposition to a very great deal of this, we have found, as a result of the elements we have hinted at, and in some of her novels in its very highest form—notably in *Lord Oakburn's Daughters*, *George Canterbury's Will*, *The Red Court Farm*, *Mildred Arkell*, and *St. Martin's Eve*—one of the most rare and at the same time one of the most unmistakable evidences of true power in creative art; and that is the quality of *inevitableness* in the development of the characters.

"You can foresee in a general way how the thing will necessarily end, and this only whets the desire to know how it will end.

"Take *Lord Oakburn's Daughters*. The characters of the four sisters are admirably contrasted and sustained. Lady

Jane, so serious and self-respecting, so submissive to tradition and legitimate authority, so considerate of others and yet so ready to defy what she regarded as unjust or really inconsiderate towards herself, there is no likelihood that she should compromise herself, or act in any headstrong manner. Lady Laura is headstrong, vain—a flirt from the first moment that we see her—sure almost to fall into some pit dug for her by any one who is designing enough and cool enough to carry out the deception in a polished manner. As for that dead sister, it is evident that she was independent in character, and too self-reliant, without the check of insight and experience, and also rushed on her fate through other defects than her sprightlier and more foolhardy sister. The picture of Lady Jane, when her father, to her surprise, brought back the governess as his wife, is one in which mastery of situation and faithful character-drawing are alike conspicuous. And then the youngest, we see in her precisely the influence we should expect from Lady Jane, sufficient to steady and to guide.

"We find the same power in *George Canterbury's Will.*

"The leading characters are all life-like, real—what is more, their character is their fate. Caroline, who rejects the honest, frank and manly Thomas Kage, for the sake of George Canterbury's money, and who, when the time comes, fancies she has only to throw herself at Thomas Kage to be accepted, we see her fate prefigured in the very capability for so acting. She rejected the gold for the tinsel when the gold was at her feet, and finds herself the slave and victim of the tinsel at the last, when, in reaction, she weds the designing, unscrupulous scoundrel, Captain Dawkes.

"'A knave is nothing but a fool with a circumbendibus' was hardly ever better illustrated.

"And Captain Dawkes, too, we see his fate prefigured in the very first glimpse we have of him. But Mrs. Wood manages to sustain the needful interest in the contemptible creature by the play of a fine humour. Some of the scenes in which he figures with his sister Keziah are very powerful; and the relations in which the two place themselves to the old, crusty, good-hearted, penetrating, half-deaf Mrs. Garston, with her stick and its significant rap-rap when she has anything emphatic to say, may take rank with the studies of the earlier masters for truth, realism, and incisive portraiture.

"And Mrs. Henry Wood has the genius to act on Charles Reade's motto without affecting it.

"The characters unfold themselves by word, by action; she does not describe, or describes but little. For faithfulness of outline, for force of presentation, few studies in character of recent years have been better than old Mrs. Garston. Millicent Canterbury and Keziah (given up, with all a weak woman's fondness, to the hopeless task of reforming a rake, or at least of catering for him when she can) are fine contrasts; as are Thomas Kage and Barnaby Dawkes. Nor do we forget Lady Kage and her peculiarities, nor poor Belle Annesley and her fate, which imparts a pathetic colour to the latter part of the story. Here, less than in some other of Mrs. Wood's stories, there is no strain in the plot; the conception is simple, natural; and the characters in working out their destiny create, as it were, the action and the complexity of circumstances. The story has very great elements of interest.

"In *Roland Yorke*, too, you see the same tokens of power. The various characters forecast themselves; poor Hamish Channing, too sensitive, delicate, tremulous, with fine genius unrealised or undeveloped; Gerald Yorke, with his lacquer polish, pretension, low cunning, jealousy, and mean revenge; and Roland Yorke, incapable of *finesse* as incapable of suspicion, though his instincts about Gerald held him right. That scene where Roland is summoned to the bedside of his relative, the baronet, whom he is to succeed, and cannot be made to realise it as possible that he can be successor to the wealth and title, is in its own way excellent.

"Poor Roland—with his tons of frying-pans in Natal, a drug and a failure, which he could not help referring to, in his frank, boyish way, to the constant discomfort, even disgust, of some of his friends—was a true gentleman at heart; the unconventional, Nature's gentleman; and as such Mrs. Wood meant him to be accepted, in contrast to the polish and veneer of that gentleman of the world Gerald Yorke. That there is no definite pointing of the contrast only makes the effect the more felt—the author leaves the contrasted pictures to point their own moral, just as in life itself.

"In *Dene Hollow*, too—though here a great deal more of the mysterious is introduced and used effectively for the author's purposes—we have proof of the same power in the portraits of Tom Clanwaring and his cousin Geoffrey, in Maria Owen, and at least one other character.

"In *Verner's Pride*, also, we note the presence of the same characteristics, associated with more of plot, mystery, and surprise, which Mrs. Wood, in her happier conceptions,

knew so well how to combine with fresh, natural studies of life.

"Who that has read *Verner's Pride* can forget the trials of that honest gentleman Mr. Lionel Verner, so resolved to do right, yet acting fatally under impulse in submitting himself to the wiles of a designing siren, and rejecting a faithful lover, who, however, proved herself to be one of the truest stamp, and in the end found her reward; or Jan, that genuine, but awkward medical practitioner, despised by his family, who were, indeed, half-ashamed of him, but who in a crisis could do the most self-denying things without any thought that they deserved any particular notice, and finally surprised them all by making such a marriage—'poor, despised, ill-dressed Jan'—as brought honour to the house.

"That is a true study,—close, careful, loving, direct from life, surely; we cannot fancy that any novelist would or could invent such a character, and never have known, some time or other, just such a one, and understood and loved him as he deserved.

"It is long since we came to the conclusion that no effort of invention can produce a true character; that all the most excellent work of the novelist is, after all, as Goethe said, re-presentation; that, in its highest aspects, fiction is a mirror of life and character—no more, no less.

"What is merely spun out of the brain is like the cobweb spun out of the spider's inside; it may shine and glimmer in the sun, but the slightest wind blows it away, and leaves no more record or impression than if it had not been.

"What an author has met, faithfully observed, and lovingly

and patiently dwelt on, is that which pleases us—which holds us as with a sense of right. The fable may be and must be in so far invented; but that, with a true novelist, is only the string on which the jewels are strung. The art lies in preserving the sense of consistency in character and act, and making it minister to the fable or the movement.

"In her best moods Mrs. Henry Wood does this, as George Eliot and Mrs. Gaskell did it. She tells us what she has known and felt; and every now and then we are pulled up with a sense of surprise, remarking to ourselves: 'That, at any rate, is a bit of autobiography, nothing less.' In *The Channings*, and yet more expressly in *Mrs. Halliburton's Troubles*, this is felt; and in *Johnny Ludlow* the peculiar way in which the author's experiences are involved with those of the young lad forms one of the main attractions in the book.

"The reader may not always realise this; it was not the intention of the author that he should realise it, and the triumph of her art is here—that what she has seen and known is so faithfully translated to us through the medium of a young and forming mind—a mature mind speaking through the medium of a young mind without any sense of egotism or contradiction.

"But all the time, while we believe in *Johnny Ludlow*, we know that Johnny Ludlow is himself a creation, in the sense of being indirectly represented, like any other character. The simpler the art in this kind—the less of consciously-created machinery used as a means to forward the author's plan—the more of dramatic genius in the higher sense we have, for it is much easier to spin a fable than to portray a character

consistently and continuously on the mere planes of ordinary life and incident.

"It was universally acknowledged, on the appearance of the first *Johnny Ludlow* papers, that they were masterpieces in their own line. The later ones, it may be, failed a little in the freshness, the clear outline, the natural atmosphere that marked the earlier. This was also unavoidable; but even they would have made a reputation if they had come first.

"The dramatic atmosphere is so well maintained. It is the young lad who speaks from first to last—there is no lapse in this respect. Even if he becomes a little loose and garrulous, and inclined to dwell on less important points, it is still Johnny Ludlow to whom we listen. The pathos is natural and never forced; the humour is never hackneyed; all the world of that gruff, bluff, kindly old Worcestershire squire is painted for us with the simplest realism, seen through the double medium of the squire's experience and Johnny's inexperience or half-experience.

"Mrs. Wood's rare knowledge of boy-nature, and her insight into it, of which we had had many evidences in *The Channings*, *Lady Grace*, etc., come out here in a very definite and attractive manner.

"*Johnny Ludlow* was published with the utmost secrecy as to authorship at first; and yet, though the *Argosy*, Mrs. Wood's own magazine, was the medium, the secret was kept for a long time—in fact, the papers were issued in book form, and had been reviewed in all the leading critical journals, before the authorship was guessed at; and then it was

divulged, not by a reviewer, as a result of insight, but by the author.

"Mrs. Wood apparently had a purpose in thus acting. It had become the habit of criticism to treat her as though she were merely a spinner of plot,—a dealer in murders, mysteries, surprises, and moving accidents of all kinds. She took the best means of disproving these allegations, and at the same time had the very best sort of victory over the reviewers that it is possible for an author to have. The self-same elements that were so highly praised in the first *Johnny Ludlow* volumes were the very qualities which had so long and persistently been denied her.

"And the victory of the author over the reviewers did not end here. For this reason: that a careful and acute critic, had he read with close attention and impartial eye the earlier novels of Mrs. Henry Wood, could scarcely have escaped finding that her treatment of boy-nature, from the beginning, was just such as to lead to expectation of such a work as *Johnny Ludlow.*

"We look in vain elsewhere for such renderings. Other authors, like Mrs. Hodgson Burnett, have made admirable little panel pictures, if we may call them so, with a single figure set forward marked by unmistakable grace and sentiment, as in *Little Lord Fauntleroy;* but there is a sense of exceptional and over-refined delicacy about this work as about others of its class; a remoteness from real boy-nature; a something so wistfully select and uncommon that it strictly belongs to a class by itself. It stands to Mrs. Wood's *Johnny Ludlow* papers, and the sketches of boy-life in the earlier

novels, precisely as a painting of the Watteau type does to the realistic delineations of the French peasant-painter, Millet. In Mrs. Henry Wood you have the English boy set before you precisely as he is, with all his frank honesty, with all his ingenuousness, with all his unconscious rudeness, his *insouciance*, his trickiness, and his queer mixture of unaffected affection and capacity for cruelty, in certain directions. No lady-writer, in this respect, has ever approached her.

"We recall here, as a feeble justification of what we have said, a little passage from *Lady Grace*—a novel that has some of the weakness as well as much of the strength of the author—in which two half-brothers are set before us—Cyrus and Charley Baumgarten; very fine boy-studies indeed. The two are at the College School in a Cathedral City, and there is a chronic feud between the boys of that school and the boys of a Charity School near by. One day Charley—the younger—gets set upon by a posse of these boys, and his big brother reaches him just in time to beat them off. He then leads Charley, whom, on his own account, he constantly bullies and sits upon, into the cloisters and soothes him; and the dialogue which follows stands almost alone, at once, for truth, humour, and pathetic touches.

"In *A Life's Secret* we have some very remarkable work in the way of character-study—the more that we now know that Mrs. Wood had never come into any personal relation with the class she there so effectively paints.

"The life of the workmen at Hunter & Hunter's, the contractors, in their very contrasted types, are exhibited with fidelity, force, and the finest sense of dramatic effect. All the

life of *Daffodil's Delight*, both in its brighter and shadier aspects, the low cunning and self-serving, fox-like pertinacity of some, the generous self-denial and unconscious heroism of others towards neighbours in misfortune or in sickness; the squalor, sly drunkenness, and vice on the part of some, and the patient well-doing and unpretending honesty and faithfulness of others—all is pictured with the clearness and decision which one could have fancied only possible to close familiarity and daily observation.

"The finest work, in this respect, is in the exhibition of what are the most unpleasant types in themselves—another proof of power.

"Sam Shuck in his own way is unique; the pattern of all the low, cunning strike-leaders that have been, or are to be, who, themselves inefficient and incompetent in work, or incurably lazy, would sacrifice the peace and happiness of neighbours for the sake of indulging, as long as they may, their love of fine clothes and good dinners, and posing as persons having influence and authority, whose 'gift of the gab' and low cunning are their capital.

"We wish we had space to give the picture of the first meeting of the workmen, with Sam Shuck's irresistible speeches, or the episode of Sam Shuck's defeat, when, disguised, he forms one of a party to maltreat the men who had gone back to work, and in which Austen Clay—a natural and consistent piece of portraiture from first to last—shows himself the better man.

"The whole thing is relieved by the sketches of the Quales, the Baxendales, and a few others; and the pathetic touches

associated with Mary Baxendale and her mother are made the more effective from their unexpectedness, and the force of contrast with what is around and prevailing. Mary Baxendale is indeed a fine character, sketched in a spirit of large sympathy; and that episode of self-denial in the pawning of her one little bit of 'fine art' is indeed touching. And Mrs. Dunn —the eager supporter of Shuck in his first efforts, and his unyielding enemy in the end—is also good. 'Ain't nine hours a day enough for the men to be at work?' she urges. 'I can tell the Baxendales what—when we've got the nine hours all straight and sure, we shall next demand eight—'tain't freeborn Englishers as is going to be put upon. It'll be glorious times, girls, won't it?'"

In praising Mrs. Henry Wood's comprehension of a boy's life and character, Dr. Japp does her no less than justice. She was brought up in such an atmosphere: was constantly surrounded by college boys, and, in her quiet way—too delicate and sensitive to be actively amongst them—must have closely observed their characters and dispositions, grasped and comprehended their very natures, many-sided as the nature of a school-boy is. Out of this element was evolved Johnny Ludlow, with all his realism; a character so true as life. Her own brothers were college boys, and constantly brought their friends to the house. Cyrus and Charley Baumgarten, sons of the Church dignitary, were their schoolfellows and companions; they are not mere creations of the fancy, but actually lived, and were exactly as represented. The very incident to which the article refers was a true one, and if the conversation which

ensues between the two boys did not actually take place, we can easily imagine that something of the sort did.

In all this Mrs. Wood was only reproducing her own experience; what she had observed, what she *knew*. And where actual experience was wanting, genius stepped in with its intuition and supplied the material. "How could you delineate that phase so accurately, you who have never passed through it?" Charlotte Brontë was once asked. "I don't know," she replied. "I thought about it morning after morning when I awoke, and at last it came to me. *How* it came I cannot tell." Julia Kavanagh once made a very similar remark to the writer. If in developing a story or constructing a plot she were sometimes puzzled to know how such and such a character would act under certain conditions, or what would be the effect of a particular combination of circumstances in her drama, she let the matter lie fallow for a time in her brain. In the end, by some secret power or intuition, the right solution always came to her. But Julia Kavanagh was greater as an essayist than as a novelist. Pure and charming as her stories are, they, for the most part, lack that dramatic force and vigorous grasp of subject necessary to place all novels on "the shelf of the immortals." Yet would it be well if in these days many writers followed in her healthy and wholesome footsteps.

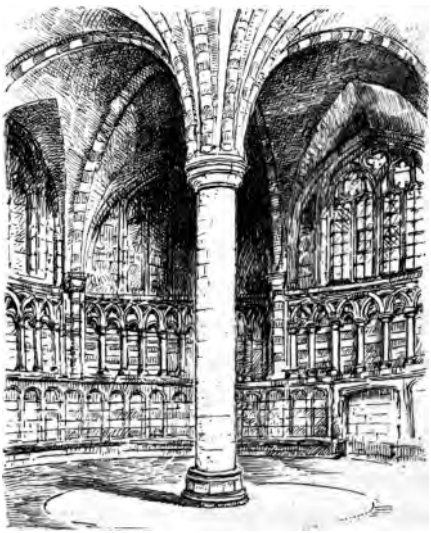
The end of our task approaches. We have recorded the little we have to say about Mrs. Wood's literary life. In this matter her works are her best memorial, and in one sense can be her only memorial. For her life was so simple that, in

point of literary detail or adventure, it consisted solely in the work she produced. Nothing about her was studied, nothing was done for effect. Not a single word in any of her letters was ever inserted to "point a moral or adorn a tale." She kept nothing. Nearly all her MSS. and letters were destroyed; everything as soon as its purpose was accomplished. What she had to say, she said simply, straightforwardly, concisely, with no digressions. Possibly in the earlier years it was different; the years when Mrs. Wood's life was passed under Southern skies, and she sat on Alpine terraces listening to the song of the nightingales and writing poetry. In those days her letters may have been, and probably were, full of romance and imagination; but we possess none of them. In the ensuing years, when all romance had died and the pen was taken up in earnest work, mind and strength were devoted to that object alone. In this also she was wise.

OLD WORCESTERSHIRE HOUSES.

CHAPTER XXV

" Abiding with me till I sail
To seek thee on the mystic deeps,
And this electric force, that keeps
A thousand pulses dancing, fail."



CHAPTER-HOUSE, WORCESTER CATHEDRAL.

AFTER *East Lynne* was published there followed many years of earnest work, during which between thirty and forty books were written. They were years of quiet happiness, which Mrs. Wood made a delight to those about her; full of rest and repose, with no great sorrows or changes to remark their passing.

Once or twice health gave way from overwork; the brain needed rest, and home had to be left for absences of two or

three months for change of scene and influence. At such times no remedy was ever so effectual as the fresh breezes of the Kentish coast. She never grew tired of watching the glorious sea and wonderful sunsets. The white cliffs of England charmed her. The winds that blew straight from the North Pole seemed charged with healing on their wings. The remedy never failed. Before long, vigour returned to the brain, elasticity to the step, animation to the countenance.

But on one occasion she felt more seriously overworked than usual. It was at the time that she had begun to write *The Master of Greylands.* The overstrain came on suddenly, and as the first portion had appeared it was impossible to give up, yet seemed equally impossible to go on. Sleepless nights threatened serious disorder, and the least effort caused them.

What was to be done? Only absolute rest could be advised, and that was not to be taken. She decided to leave home, in spite of "the chilling blasts of January," and go down to her favourite coast — a better wintering place than is generally supposed. Here for three months she lived a quiet life of seclusion, writing only for an hour or an hour and a half every day, spending much time in looking upon the ebb and flow of the sea, which washed up very near to her windows. In the movement of the water there was something peculiarly restful to the brain; it soothed the overstrained nerves, and induced the sleep that undue work had temporarily banished. Nothing ever delighted her like the sea; she was never tired of watching its broad and ever-changing expanse. We have said that she was peculiarly

susceptible to harmony of colour; and the colours of the sea, changing from day to day with every passing cloud, the varying wind, fascinated her. So also with the sunsets — especially if they could be followed across the water. She would watch all the gorgeous effects with the keenest enjoyment and reverence, her thoughts ever filled, we may be sure, with the unseen glories beyond. The golden-tinted clouds turning to orange, with a background of sea-green sky; the wonderful opaline only found in the north; the pale blue graduating into the deeper purple. These were the things in nature that she most studied and loved; sea and sky; charmed by soft moonlight effects as much as by the brilliant sunsets.

On the occasions we have mentioned she had left home somewhat depressed, thinking that in *The Master of Greylands* she had begun her last work; fearing she might not perhaps finish even this. But at the end of three months she returned home restored, and never again suffered in the same way. Her health, however, was beginning to fail, though by imperceptible degrees. The foundation for this seemed to be laid during one of these very absences from home. And on that occasion it was curious that she remarked to one of the many friends who had met her at the station to bid her goodbye: "I don't know why I am going away, for I never felt better in my life." Alas, it was the commencement of a long and last farewell.

It happened that year on the Kentish coast that a quarrel took place between the lord of the manor and the contractor who removed the seaweed from the shore. In consequence of this the seaweed was left to decay, with deplorable results.

Many in the town died from typhoid fever. Mrs. Wood, at all times peculiarly sensitive, ought immediately to have returned home; but every hour was expected to end the quarrel, and she remained. At the end of ten days she was seized with a diphtheritic sore throat, and for a short time was dangerously ill. From the immediate effects of this she recovered, but it appeared to have left such permanent influence upon her that she never again felt really well.

She dated her decline from that hour. Once or twice after that she left home, though never again to visit Kent, for whose bracing air she had now become too delicate. Then came a time when home itself was never left. For some years before the end she never quitted even the house, though retaining quiet energy and youth even to the last. She would receive and entertain her friends with as much pleasure and animation as ever; but strength was gradually diminishing. The spinal weakness was growing greater. Very soon she began to realise how great was that weakness; how almost impossible she often found it to sit at the head of her table; but even then she was not aware that the inward curvature was fatally pressing more and more upon the heart. This was only really known a few days before the end came.

Though she never left the house, she was not ill, nor was she in any way considered an invalid; remaining at home more as a precaution than because she was not well enough to go out. She had become peculiarly susceptible to severe bronchial colds, which caused her so much suffering that she dreaded every fresh attack, from which she seemed to recover with more and more difficulty. At length to brave the air was

impossible; she had become too sensitive, and suffered from the slightest change of temperature. In this she resembled her father, who in the later years of his life—almost entirely passed in his study—was never without a fire, summer or winter, and scarcely ever ventured beyond his own rooms.

Then came one Christmas Day which was to be for ever memorable—the Christmas of 1886. The previous day she had caught cold, and on Christmas Day, *because* it was Christmas Day, though feeling almost incapable of exertion, with the courage that had distinguished her through life, she came down to breakfast. She had seldom felt so ill, and it almost seemed as though a prevision that she had entered upon the beginning of the end was upon her. The habit had never been given up, when breakfasting with her children, of reading a chapter aloud at the close of the meal. On this occasion two of them only were present, and she chose the 21st chapter of Revelation. She reached the fourth verse: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." Here, and twice more during the chapter, she—the self-contained and the reliable—had to pause in order to retain her self-control. Even then she must have felt that for her "the former things had passed away." Her last Christmas had dawned; soon her place would know her no more. She had had many previsions in life, and no doubt the sure knowledge of her approaching end came to her then. But she quietly closed the book and made no remark.

All that day she kept up, and at night presided at her

family dinner-party, courageously making no sign ; but at the end of the evening she murmured to one sitting near her : " I almost feel as if I were dying." Yet never had she looked more radiant. A little later on, and with great difficulty, leaning on the arm of one of her sons, she reached her own room. The pressure upon the heart was making it almost impossible to breathe—one of the most painful of all experiences. She was never to come down again.

The next day she was unable to rise, and her doctor, who had attended her for many years and thoroughly understood her, was early at her bedside. Three days afterwards she had thrown off her cold in a wonderful manner, and seemed almost well again. Every one about her rejoiced ; so rapid a recovery had never been known, for her bronchial attacks would last for very many days and sometimes weeks. " It seems almost miraculous," she laughingly remarked. " I cannot understand it. If I did not feel so wonderfully well, I should say that something was going to happen." Sadly prophetic words.

Her doctor still wished her to keep her room, but she felt so well that she thought it unnecessary. She, however, agreed to remain on the same floor for a day or two, and occupy her study.

The very next day she seemed a little less well, and every day a little and a little less well. The difficulty to breathe was great and caused much suffering, and added to this was a distressing cough which probably partly arose from heart-trouble. This continued until the first of February, and during that time, though she said little, her sufferings were extreme—the suffering of breathlessness and great exhaustion.

Yet even now a little work was done; a few proofs were corrected for press, a few letters written; she gave advice upon many matters; talked and settled many of her affairs as one talks and settles who feels he has done with life. All was done with the greatest calmness and heroism. But the solemnity of the hour was seen in the expression of her eyes, which seemed to have gained a greater depth, an unspeakable seriousness. Earth was passing; she saw heaven opening. To such a mind and to such a life as hers the momentous issues would be realised to their utmost. She had ever dwelt much upon the thought of death, the awful hour of departure, when the long unknown journey has to be taken and the Dark Valley, with its shadow, lies immediately before us. Often when her children were young she was fond of gathering them around her, and of reading *Sintram* to them, a book she much loved. The translation of that day was far better than any that has since appeared. We still hear the echo of her sweet and serious voice as she repeated the verse—

"My Lord and God, I pray,
Turn from my heart away
This world's turmoil:
And call me to Thy Light,
Be it through sorrow's night,
Through pain or toil."

And again—

"When death is drawing near,
And thy heart shrinks in fear,
And thy limbs fail:
Lift up thy heart and pray
To Him who leads the way
Through the dark vale."

In looking back upon her life, she one day remarked that it seemed to have passed as a flash; it appeared but as yesterday that she was a child playing in her grandfather's home. Yet few lives had been more truly *lived;* few had done more work, gone through greater trials. But the beauty of her nature, the purity and innocence of the years, unburdened by regrets of conscience, of duties unfulfilled or time wasted, made the life at its end seem strangely short and fleeting. Not hers the reproach of talents wasted, but rather the result of the good steward: "Lord, Thou hast committed unto me five talents; behold, I have gained five talents more." And the award: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

This was now to be hers, and she might say with St. Paul: "I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course." She had "endured to the end." The good seed had not fallen on barren ground. Her faith was not to fail in the last trying hours. "I know in whom I have believed." "When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee: they shall not overwhelm thee." There was her consolation. *Look well to the end* had been one of the mottoes of her life; and with the great Eastern King she had engraved upon her heart the warning: *This also shall pass away.*

Much of these last days were spent alone in quiet thought and contemplation. She was too ill and suffering to converse very much, and insisted upon others not devoting very much time to the tedium of an invalid's room. Through life she had thought of others; always others, never self.

It had been the custom to have a family dinner-party

every year on her birthday—the 17th of January. But on this occasion, for the first time, it had to be postponed. One of her last letters was written to a son—who soon followed her to the Silent Land—telling him that she was too ill to join in the usual gathering, but hoping before very long to be well enough to come down and take her place amongst them again. It was not to be; and probably a voice was telling her even then that it never would be. No doubt she was so bravely meeting the end not only for her own sake, but for the sake of those around her. She could not help realising that their loss must be an endless sorrow. It was indeed already as a two-edged sword. Already the Shadow was upon the house, and steps went softly and voices were hushed; a fact was being slowly realised none dare look upon, and would not whisper even to each other.

A whole month passed thus; the month of January. Every day a change for the better was hoped for, and every day seemed to bring a slight change for the worse. Much of that month, we have said, was spent alone. How the past must have been dwelt upon—for her unfailing memory could carry her through almost every incident of her life. In nothing was her memory more remarkable than in this wonderful power of being able to trace out its events literally almost day by day.

It almost seemed that approaching departure had added a keenness to her vision; as the mortal receded, the spiritual and the intellectual grew brighter, as though the loosening bands of earth made higher flight possible. All her soul, we have said, seemed in her eyes, all the intensity of her nature to concentrate itself in her expression. Every time

one near and dear to her entered her study there went forth a yearning gaze which spoke silently of the agony of approaching separation, but nothing was said. Life is sad; we all travel on the same road, which has a parting and a solitary journey at the end; sooner or later the "rending asunder" must needs come.

The days of that darkened January went slowly on, bringing no relief or consolation. Her birthday was spent in the quietude of her study. Seventy-three times had the sun risen and set for her on that day, and it had set for the last time. But even yet this was not known. Whilst there was life, hope could never be given up. The days went on, and she kept up bravely, day by day suffering more and more from weakness and difficulty of breathing. She would not give in, though the illness was asserting itself more firmly and fatally. At length, on the 31st of January, she felt that she could battle no longer, and remarked to her doctor that she would return to bed for a few days. Though she did not say so, she must have felt that the end was approaching. A consultation was desired. "It is useless," she replied, "nothing can be done." But to please those about her she yielded. Then, for the first time, the mischief was explained. Her own doctor had known it but kept silence. The spine pressing upon the heart prevented its working, and there could be but one termination. This might yet be delayed, but the end must come.

And now every day there was a decided change for the worse. She still sat up part of the day, but it was pain and grief to her. The suffering from exhaustion was intense,

though the breathlessness had been mercifully removed. These days were borne with the utmost fortitude and patience. She, who had ever thought for others, had now to be the constant care of others. Frequent were her expressions of gratitude, whilst the hearts of those about her ached because they could do so little; repeated her words of thankfulness for the mercies with which Heaven had surrounded her, and which were rendering less painful these last days of intense suffering.

Through all she never lost her youthful look, her beauty and radiant complexion. Never had she looked better or appeared mentally brighter. It seemed impossible that death could be so near; almost impossible that death could ever be near.

On the Saturday evening she received the last rites of the Church, and from that moment no doubt felt that she had done with earth. Her faith seemed to shine more and more brightly to the end. There was no wavering. Steadfast as she had lived, so she remained in the trying hours of the close. Her clergyman, who saw her only on the occasion of administering the sacrament, afterwards spoke from the pulpit of her wonderful calmness and serenity, the brave manner in which she awaited the awful moment. After that memorial sermon the Dead March in "Saul" was played, and the congregation remained standing to the end.

On the last Sunday night of all she again sat up, and never had looked more herself. She conversed in her quiet tones, and for the sake of those about her wondered if she might yet recover for a time. She spoke upon many topics: amongst others of a book which had lately

appeared, and created some sensation, saying that had she been in her usual health, she should have wished to read it; asking for some of its points to be described to her.

Then presently she referred calmly to her approaching end, and with unwavering voice gave directions as to the plainness and simplicity of the last ceremony of all. The very tomb was discussed, and one asked her whether, if it were possible, the husband, who had died many years before, might be removed to another vault. "I leave you to do exactly as you like in all ways," was her quiet reply. Her eyes never dimmed, her glance spoke of a peace not of this world. The heroism that had been with her through life remained with her in death.

On the Monday morning there appeared a great change for the worse. For a short time she thought the immediate end was at hand. Then came a slight rally, and she revived. But it was evident that the time could not be prolonged. Yet again that day she rose for a time with all her wonted bravery, and sat and talked in her easy-chair to those about her, but everything indicated that the end was approaching.

That last day was one of great suffering and exhaustion; but again she rose towards evening and sat up for an hour. On returning to bed, she felt the effort had been too great; and she said to one of her sons, when he entered the room: "It is nearly over." Then added, after a pause: "The end must come for us all."

A little later on, speaking of her past work and life, she remarked: "I once thought of writing the experiences of a governess in the same manner that I have written *Johnny*

Ludlow. I am quite sure they would have been very popular. But it is all over—all over."

Again, later, she said to one very near and dear to her, who was sitting beside her in the sorrow which makes no sign: "It is nearly over." "Life is short," was the reply; "we shall soon come to you." "Oh, yes, yes," she fervently answered. "Only do your best—in all ways," she added, with intense earnestness. The last sentence she ever spoke to him was a prayer for God's blessing. After that all seemed over in this world.

Always thoughtful for others, she insisted that no one should sit up with her that night, showing in this her wonderful courage and self-reliance, for it was equivalent to meeting death alone; she must have felt and known there would be no next morning for her.

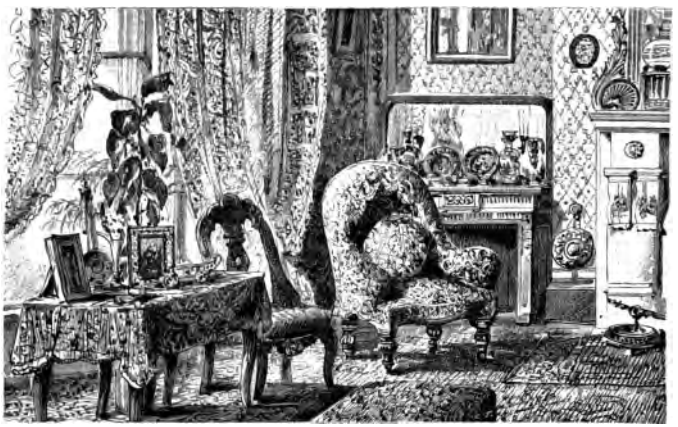
But, unknown to her, her maid remained in an adjoining room, accompanied by a nurse who had that day been sent in by her doctor. If she needed anything in the night she had promised to ring, but when the end was at hand the power to ring had departed. In the night, her maid went in quietly, and saw that the great Change was approaching. She could no longer speak, but the beautiful eyes were still full of expression, full of thought, realising and saying as plainly as eyes could indicate that the supreme moment was at hand.

All were hastily summoned to the presence they would never have left but at her expressed wish and command. When one entered the room who had been so intimately associated with her in work and companionship throughout

life, the eyes were closed, never again to open in this world. But life was still there, and consciousness as great as ever, and with her hand in his, the awful moments passed until the pure and beautiful spirit had winged its flight, and time was swallowed up in eternity.

At the very last instant she made a movement of the head, as full of intelligence and consciousness as at any time of her life; and though unable to make any sign, it was evident that she knew all that was taking place, and those who were present. On Wednesday morning, the 10th of February 1887, about half-past three, she passed away. And upon those who watched there fell a sorrow that would never cease. Well for all that

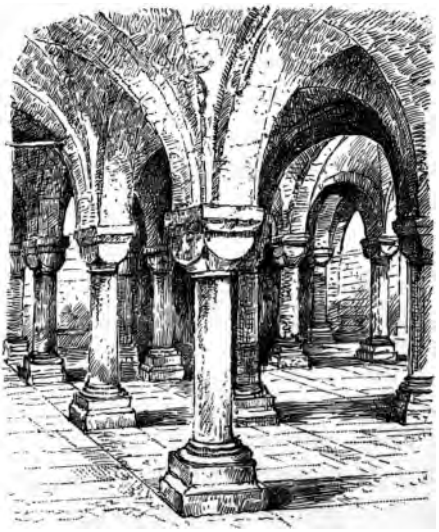
> "Far out of sight, while sorrow still enfolds us,
> Lies the fair country where our hearts abide."



THE VACANT CHAIR.

CHAPTER XXVI

"But in my spirit will I dwell,
And dream my dream and hold it true;
For though my lips may breathe adieu,
I cannot think the thing farewell."



CRYPT, WORCESTER CATHEDRAL.

To the world the death of Mrs. Henry Wood came as a surprise. Her illness had not been reported, and it was but little known that the pen had fallen for ever from the hand that had done so much good and earnest work.

Here, as in everything else in life, she was simple and unobtrusive. At all times she disliked any personal attention. To have appeared in public or faced a crowd, this would ever

have been impossible. She would read with wonder of ladies who attended meetings and addressed multitudes from a platform. She loved a domestic life, to be surrounded by friends, to extend her hospitalities and shed happiness abroad. But from contact with the outer world she shrank with the sensitiveness of extreme refinement and physical helplessness. And so when she became ill, and hope gradually passed away, she would allow only her most intimate friends to be made aware of the truth. In like manner she expressed a wish that her funeral should be as simple and quiet as possible, so that the end of all should not be inconsistent with her life. Her wishes were regarded; but things cannot be kept secret, and both in the church of St. Stephen's and at the cemetery a crowd had assembled to pay their last respects to one whom in life, whether they knew her personally or not, they had loved.

From public and private sources came innumerable notices and regrets, and amongst the former none gave greater pleasure than the following lines. We quote them because they were so true, so full of appreciation: the unknown writer earning the gratitude of hearts bowed down.

"Novelists like Mrs. Henry Wood should never die. We miss them too much—miss them particularly at the present moment, when the art of fiction-writing is on the decline, when novelists appear to think that the breaking and patching up again of the Seventh Commandment is the be-all and end-all of domestic romance and story-telling. A quarter of a century has passed since the world, rushing to the libraries in

search of *East Lynne*, declared to Mrs. Henry Wood that she had become famous. Nor has the verdict ever been reversed. The book is read as freely and as generally to-day as it was a decade ago. Its theme has been parodied a thousand times. Its plot has given good material for minor novelists to spoil. The story has been prepared for the stage by more dramatists than one; but with regard to this latter, the author has gained not one shilling. Of this wide and vexed question, however, it is not now our intention to speak. We do not wish to dilate upon a writer whose brains have been robbed so that other people might become rich. We have quite enough in hand when we are driven to contemplate the fact that one of the most prolific, and at the same time most delightful of novelists has been removed. For Mrs. Henry Wood was an active, a zealous, and an industrious worker in the field of literature. She was more than that—she was an ornament to it. The pure and wholesome tones and textures of her many books all proclaim that by her death literature has lost a counterfoil to that baser form of modern writing which seeks not the advancement of noble thought, but the mental gratification of aimless and senseless passions.

"As to the work achieved by Mrs. Henry Wood, the record is a long but dignified one. If all her novels—and they number over thirty—were not of equal merit, she only proved that it is impossible for a writer to be always at his or her best. Her earlier work appeared in periodicals which she had outlived. Her connection with it made that popular magazine the *Argosy*. Her sketches by *Johnny Ludlow* will remain in

popular favour, just as her novels will be inquired for when generations have passed away.

"We do not propose now to analyse the methods which as a weaver of fiction Mrs. Henry Wood adopted. We are content to admit their great and lasting success. It is perhaps because, when what we know as sensation creeps into them, the sensation is always of a homely and domestic kind. There is much that is strongly dramatic in what Mrs. Henry Wood has written, but the dramatic incidents and effects, if they surprise and interest, never terrify. Readers do not rush for a volume by Mrs. Henry Wood if they wish to be terribly frightened. The skilful manipulation of plot may amaze, but it does not quicken morbid desires nor heighten unworthy passion. Novels that do this seldom live. They are written to meet the whims and caprices of a given age, in which, perhaps, a certain taint of indelicacy has got the upper hand in the minds of the more frivolous of men and women. The novels of Mrs. Henry Wood have been suited to the tastes of the past, and they will be found suitable to the cravings of the future. To the regular and inveterate novel-reader the death of Mrs. Henry Wood will raise many a sorrow and regret. We do not like to know that the pen which has instructed and amused us so often is to weave no more garlands of homely story for us. Such novels as we have been alluding to become our companions. The characters in them become living pictures in that gallery of life in which we walk and muse. These pictures may age and become immortal, but we would fain believe that their creator was immortal as well. But this cannot be, and the best tribute, therefore,

we can pay the dead novelist is to remember and revere her in the graceful works she has bequeathed to us and to posterity."

It was a true and graceful recognition of a writer who had passed away, of work well done.

One of the principal daily papers, in a leading article, made the following remarks:

"Mrs. Henry Wood, whose death is announced this morning, was one of the most voluminous and the most successful of modern novelists. She commenced her literary career under the care of the House of Bentley, and unlike the average successful novelist, from Dickens downwards, who beats about for fuller advantage with new publishers, the connection between author and publisher remained undisturbed to the last. . . .

"When *East Lynne* appeared, the new novelist's reputation was at once established. An enormous number of the work has been sold. It has been translated into all Continental languages and some Oriental ones. But this is only one branch of the success the story has attained. It was at an early date adapted to the stage, where its success was almost equal to that attained in book form. At the present time there are three dramatic versions of *East Lynne* nightly presented to the English-speaking public in various parts of the world. Had the author been granted even a small percentage on the returns, she would have been a rich woman. We believe that as a matter of fact she never received during the past quarter of a century a single penny in acknowledgment of the profits made by others from the stage presentation of *East Lynne*.

The adapters of *East Lynne* grew rich, and Mrs. Henry Wood was kept out of their calculations.

"Since the appearance of *East Lynne*, Mrs. Henry Wood has written some thirty novels, which have varied only in the measure of success. In Australia the sale of her works vies with that of Charles Dickens's books." [It has since exceeded them.] "Hers was indeed a busy and a happy life. The pen fell from her hand only in the last days of failing strength. Up to the last her mental activity withstood the insidious approaches of growing physical weakness. Unlike Dickens and Thackeray, Mrs. Henry Wood leaves no unfinished work behind. . . . Like most authors whose names are prominently before the public, Mrs. Henry Wood had an enormous correspondence with literary aspirants. Young authors turned instinctively to her for advice and counsel, and seldom turned in vain. . . . Like her life, her end was placid and full of hope."

A week later the same newspaper had the following record of her funeral:

"In the bright sunshine of yesterday forenoon, a procession which attracted general attention, and evoked much sympathy and manifestations of respect, passed by the northern boundary of Regent's Park, up the main road to Highgate Cemetery. The procession consisted of sixteen carriages, and its character was proclaimed by that which came first. This was an open funeral car, drawn by four black horses; and the polished oak coffin, with its massive brass mountings, was heaped up with fragrant wreaths of choice hot-house flowers, mostly snow-white, and set about with delicate ferns. These memorial offerings of

sorrowing friends not only covered the coffin, but were piled up on either side to the lid, and hung upon the pinnacles of the hearse roof. Bystanders uncovered as this procession passed along, and the response to the oft-repeated questions whispered from house to pavement was always the same—'It is Mrs. Henry Wood, the novelist.' 'I never saw such a sight,' said one working man to another, uncovering as the procession passed them.

"The funeral was, of course, of a private character; but it attracted almost as much attention as if it had been a public ceremony with time and place of burial duly announced beforehand. The procession left the deceased lady's residence about a quarter past eleven, and halted at St. Stephen's Church, Avenue Road, where a considerable congregation was already assembled. . . . From the church the procession proceeded direct to the Upper Highgate Cemetery, and to the grave-side . . . and the service was concluded in the presence of a large concourse of people who had awaited the arrival of the cortege.

"The vaulted grave had been newly formed out of the turfed space edging the outer circle of catacombs at the very highest point of the cemetery grounds, and at the foot, therefore, of Highgate Church. Into the tomb, within a few hours, had been lowered the coffin, exhumed from its original grave and enclosed in a new coffin of polished oak, of Mr. Henry Wood, husband of the lady who was now to be laid by his side; and large floral wreaths had been placed upon this coffin before the arrival of its companion. A superb cross, composed entirely of Neapolitan violets and lilies of the valley,

hid the plate upon Mrs. Henry Wood's coffin, and smaller wreaths obscured the text upon the brass scroll: '*I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord.*' The inscription upon the breastplate was simply the name, date of birth, 17th January 1814, and of death, 10th February 1887. The scores of floral wreaths sent by literary and other friends were arranged and left upon the heavy stone slab, which, at the conclusion of the service, and in the presence of the principal mourners, was rolled to its place, covering the vault."

The day of the funeral seemed indeed to have been made purposely bright and beautiful; one of the fairest and warmest days that ever dawned in February. The previous days had been gloomy and cloudy, bitterly cold; the day after and many succeeding days were equally cold and gloomy. But the day itself was soft, sunny, and seemed a reflection of the bright spirit that had inhabited the lovely earthly tenement now for ever laid to rest.

The tomb eventually chosen was of red granite, from the quarries of Aberdeen, and was a copy of the tomb of Scipio Africanus in Rome. The lives of both had one thing in common: they were earnestly and unceasingly devoted to good purposes, and both had the welfare of mankind at heart. On the front of the tomb was engraven simply the name, Mrs. Henry Wood; beneath, the short text from Ecclesiasticus: "THE LORD GIVETH WISDOM." Never was text more fittingly applied, for surely wisdom of every description she possessed. None were so certain of this as they who knew her

MRS. HENRY WOOD'S TOMB.

most intimately, whose companion and counsellor she had been for many long years.

Innumerable were the expressions of sorrow and regret from private sources; from old and tried friends, and from unknown sympathisers. All who had known her bore witness to the influence of her singular charm and goodness. The following are a few extracts taken almost at random from a multitude of letters. Many are from friends whose names are household words in the land, and not a few from those who had never known her in life.

"The painful intelligence met me yesterday afternoon, and while I felt the consolation of knowing that suffering had ceased, and that her truly lovely and lovable spirit had entered into the joy of her Lord, I was deeply saddened by the somewhat selfish consciousness that I and mine and the world at large had lost a benefactor and a friend—of which class we have none of us too many. . . . The blessed 'memory of the just' will be your stay and support through this bitter trial—the latter will lose much of its bitterness as time rolls—the former will be lasting as life itself."

"I almost hesitate to break in upon your sorrow, yet feel it not possible to keep silence. . . . The separation must be bitter indeed. . . . That she has passed to an eternity of happiness I believe with all my heart, and though it is impossible to find even in this thought consolation for some time

to come, yet hereafter this will soften this great grief. . . . The loss you have sustained is not to be supplied, and must leave a void, and remove from you, as you say, much of the sunshine of your lives. . . . Instinctively I felt it would be so, for she was no ordinary woman. She was so vividly alive, and so sympathetic, so large-hearted as well as large-minded, that her loss to her children must be felt as irreparable. To you, too, is added the literary companionship, which I know sweetened your work, and often alone made it bearable. I heartily sympathise with you, especially in this last phase. If at such a time I may speak of myself, I like to recall that in a quarter of a century, in which I have had relations with your dear mother, no incident has occurred, not the most trivial, to dim my happy recollections of her. She was always the same to me. Such friends are not replaced, and we go through the rest of life in somewhat of diminished pleasure. . . ."

Again, later on, the same writer: "I have read with great interest your sketch of your mother; and can read between the lines how completely the face of things is altered to you now she is withdrawn. She was a very notable woman; one of those who help to keep England in her straight path of truth; and she was a very kind woman, with a large charity, without any of that weak indifference which sometimes passes for liberality of opinion. I was always much struck with a certain spirited decision upon any point on which she was questioned. She seemed able to bring her faculties together immediately, and focus them on the question before her, and to have a clear

insight into the bearings of anything brought before her. . . . One thing astonished me—her age. Seventy-three! but that I know you know, I should be incredulous."

"Will you allow me to add the expression—which, though tardily uttered, is none the less as entirely genuine as any of the numberless similar indications which you have, no doubt, ere this from every side received—the expression of my deep sympathy with you in the bereavement which not only you, but the world of letters generally has sustained, in the death of your illustrious mother. She was, in many senses of the word, one of our greatest English women."

"I feel for you so much: the loss is dreadful! such a mother—such an interchange of thought and work: where shall we find a parallel?"

"We are deeply indebted to your kindness for affording us the opportunity of testifying our loving regard to one of our best, oldest, and most beloved friends—whom to know was to admire and esteem. . . . Alas! to-day we visit the tomb of our friends, and to-morrow others visit ours. The bereavement deprives me of a friend whom I can never replace—but to you, how vast the loss! Happily, our still living though unseen friend, when dwelling among us, added largely to the mental pleasures of mankind, and by a felicitous gift of more than earthly wisdom, uttered truths never to be forgotten. May this Christian lady now know in its grand and comprehensive sense what it is to be a member of the household of

faith, and heir to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, that passeth not away."

Sent to the writer by a friend abroad on the day of Mrs. Henry Wood's death, but without knowing even of her illness:

"For the past fortnight your image has been floating before me, awake or asleep. I seemed to see a sad and marred face, and unable to wait any longer, I wrote to Miss Anne Beale for news. Only last night I was preaching of sorrow and sadness, our need of comfort, from the words: '*The God of all consolation*,' and suddenly you flashed into my mind, and I had to thrust you back to finish my sermon."

"I have some hesitation in writing to you now when your heart and your head are alike so painfully occupied, but I cannot feel satisfied until I have thanked you for your most kind letter, which has touched me more than I can express. I need not say how grateful I am for the regard in which I was held by your good and admirable mother, nor how sincerely I reciprocated her affectionate friendship. Although we met seldom of late years, since the death of Mr. Wills, I think it was understood that there was no diminution of kindly feeling for, or of faith in, each other; and now I can only deplore the loss of a most dear and most sincere friend. . . . To you the loss is irreparable; your consolation must be in the influence for good your mother has left behind her, and in the pride you must feel in her name, which is loved and honoured throughout the world. *That* is something for children to cherish in a parent; and although now it may

make your sorrow more acute, it will be an abiding solace to you in the future, which now looks sad and desolate."

"We have heard, with great sorrow for you, of the irreparable loss you are now suffering. I do not know anything I can say that could comfort you; but I pray that the consolations of God may be great towards you. We, too, have been lately brought face to face with the great mystery, for three months ago my eldest sister died suddenly—never speaking after the first stroke fell. If we had not hope in Christ beyond this life, we should be indeed most sorrowful. But I believe that all is well for us and them."

"May God give you strength to go through with your life. None can ever know your dear mother without having a very strong affection for her. She was so far above all other women."

"You will hardly believe that until yesterday I never even heard of your great loss and grief. I have myself, for exactly one month, been through great desolation and trouble; for my dear old aunt, my companion and more than mother, died on the 17th of January after a few days' illness. Since then I have lived in a sort of a maze, unable to fix my mind on any reading—even of the daily paper, which would have informed me of so great a public loss as your private grief entails. I am so very distressed and sorry for you. . . . My dear aunt, to the very end—as with my uncle and adopted father—did so delight in all and everything your mother wrote. Her name

was a passport and a household word, and the magazine or book containing anything of hers must be had at any price—even if money was scarce. Of late she was growing deaf, and found it hard to gather all of a story read aloud; but it became almost a jest that no word of any story by Mrs. Henry Wood was *ever* lost. She listened with avidity to the first part of *Lady Grace*, and was sorry she should never read the second number. The *Argosy* must indeed droop her colours and take in ballast now."

". . . I cannot realise that in this world I shall never again see that kind, calm, beautiful face, with its marvellous bloom and serenity. Nor can I realise what her removal must be to your circle, in which she had such a special headship. But think of the happy life . . . a great blessing of work and success and love and honour and dutifulness. Of her we may truly quote the words of Thomas à Kempis: 'Blessed is she that hath lived well and ended happily!' Yet I know well that none of you will feel the orphanhood the less, because it overtakes you in the heat of life's mid-day; and you have to go on living without the love and wisdom that has never failed you before for all these years. . . . Only God remains. That is the sole Comfort, after all. And He who spared her to you for so long is still keeping her for you."

"It is seldom a mother has to be mourned at once so good and so gifted. To you—having been so long and so closely associated with her in her work—the bereavement

must be doubly great. But in the midst of grief there is the consolation of a beautiful memory, and while the one becomes softened by time, the other lasts, interweaving itself with the hope of reunion."

"The loss of such a mother must indeed be a terrible grief to you, and your sorrow will be shared, not only by friends and acquaintances, but by the world-wide circle of readers to whom Mrs. Henry Wood's delightful books have endeared her. . . . Many will feel as if they had lost a personal friend—particularly the readers of the *Argosy*, who had just welcomed a new work from her pen, showing all the old freshness of charm and style. . . . Even in the midst of your grief it must be a pride and satisfaction to you to know how universally she was admired and esteemed, not only for her great talents, but for the pure and elevated spirit which breathes in all her works, and gives them a lasting influence for good."

"Most truly she deserved all praise, not only as a writer but as an exemplary good woman in every phase of her life. Although of late years we saw so little of each other, I truly loved her. Her large charitable heart was ever ready to relieve and sympathise with those in trouble. She will indeed be missed and lamented by many who, unknown to the world, have been succoured in their hour of need. Oh, in the depth of your great sorrow, you have the remembrance of her unfailing goodness to assure you that her pure spirit is now receiving its reward."

"Perhaps no word of mine can possibly lighten the weight of your sorrow. . . . Your loss, however, is a public calamity as well as a private grief, and as one amongst the many thousands of admirers of *East Lynne*, I offer you my tribute of regret."

"I have felt the deepest sympathy with you, and now can think of nothing but the great happiness I have often witnessed in your family. . . . I really loved her, and it has often afforded my wife and myself no little pleasure and pride in being numbered amongst her many friends. . . . We have frequently spoken of the close ties existing between your mother and yourself, and amongst the other members of the family circle, and expressed a hope that our children might grow up to regard us with the same affection, and that we might be equally deserving of it."

"We see with a sentiment of deep sympathy that your dear mother has just now passed on to the higher life. A happiness for her, but yet a sorrow to all who loved and esteemed her, and they were numberless. The Divine Mercy still spares me on earth, but one by one my old friends and co-labourers in the fields of literature pass on to receive their reward—and in this case it will be great, for she had always a high and noble purpose in view. I have now been so many years absent from England, that my friends may have forgotten me, or might naturally suspect that Mary Howitt was one of the departed. But no one of my friends has been forgotten by me; and all who knew me, or have any knowledge of my

former life, have known more or less of your excellent mother through my description of her wonderful powers of mind, industry, and success. . . . She was indeed a very remarkable woman from her unwearied and unwearying activity of mind and her boundless power of imagination. And no less remarkable, if not more so, was the fact of her retaining to the last that marvellous delicacy and refinement of feature and complexion which appears to have been the characteristic of her youth."

"You have sustained a loss which nothing in this world can ever replace; that of a *good mother;* of whom, though your future memories may and will be more or less sad and painful, yet they will be rendered less bitter by the sentiments of love, esteem, and honour with which all thoughts of her whom you have lost must ever be connected. Compared with your loss mine is as nothing, yet to me it is very great and irreparable. . . . I have known you and yours now for nearly twenty years, and during the whole of that time, as you are well aware, have been invariably treated with nothing but kindness by your late mother; indeed kindness is a very weak word to express my sense of Mrs. Henry Wood's treatment of myself. Her house I have ever regarded as a second home, where I always felt sure of a welcome and of real sympathy. The thought that one of such superior attainments and who held so prominent a place in the world's regard, and of such sterling worth, should so regard me, has ever been to me very precious, though humbling, as knowing how far I fell short of deserving her kindly regard. She has now passed

into the light, but though here I shall see her no more, I am sure that the remembrance of her will be an influence of guidance and comfort as long as I live."

"It is not from carelessness for the loss you, and, in a different way, all England, have sustained, that I have refrained from writing my sincere condolences. I feared to intrude in the early days of so great and irreparable grief. We all felt on reading the sad announcement of your noble mother's death, that we too had lost a true friend, and that one more of the gifted ones of earth had gone to reap the reward of a life of patient, constant, self-denying work, and of unwavering goodness. I think that Mrs. Henry Wood's life is a true and abiding lesson."

"At the risk of intruding as a stranger on holy ground, I write to express my sympathy with you in a loss which I am sure you will feel acutely. The setting sun leaves always a darkness behind it, but when it sets in crimson glory the gloom is relieved by a sense of thankfulness which I am sure you will feel."

"If it is any comfort that many mourn with you, you must surely have it, for it was impossible not to love her through what she wrote, and to many all over the world this sad news has brought, I know, a heartfelt sorrow and regret. Never can I forget the kindness she has shown me for over ten years, and there was something so lovable and natural in her letters, that, aided by my sister's description of her charm and beauty,

I seemed to know her better than many met face to face. Seldom indeed are such talents combined with such sweet and feminine goodness, and we know what great comfort there must be for you in the thought. How strangely and beautifully applicable is now all she wrote of death, with such trust, serenity, and warmth of feeling, in the *Argosy* pages of this very month! We thought of it immediately, and how much more must you have done so. . . . The loss of one so gifted and so good must leave a blank not to be filled in this world, though submitted to in sure and certain hope of reunion in a better."

"From the bottom of my heart I feel that I have lost a dear friend. All Mrs. Henry Wood's works are equally well known to me, have been my companions. They have cheered and amused me in many a dark hour of sickness and of trouble as nothing else could—so it is small wonder that I love the books, and feel grateful to the 'dead hand.' Forgive me—a stranger—for venturing to write to you at this sorrowful time."

"Though a stranger to us all, none of us ever having even seen her, yet we all loved her, and feel as if we had lost a personal friend. Her books have been a constant source of interest, instruction, and delight to us. We have read and re-read them, each time seeing fresh beauties in them, for she had that wonderful power of making all her characters absolutely real and lifelike. . . . About two years ago I wrote to Mrs. Henry Wood telling her what a pleasure and comfort her books had been to me. In return she sent me a charming

letter, which I keep amongst my greatest treasures. . . . Forgive the liberty a stranger has taken in writing to you."

"I pray you to pardon the liberty I take in writing to you, but the deep love and admiration I have for Mrs. Henry Wood's works is my excuse. I am only the wife of a working man, and therefore not able to express myself so well as my betters; but we many of us so long to know if there is any hope for Mrs. Henry Wood's works being published at a price to place them within reach of the working classes—so many desire to have them. . . . And in these days, when there are so many atheists and socialists, there is a great need for good books. Perhaps you will allow me to say that only one other author claims my love and reverence as Mrs. Henry Wood does, and that is Dickens; but his works are well within our reach, whilst of Mrs. Henry Wood's I have only been able to buy two. After the day's work—often with trouble and care—nothing rests me so much as a little reading; and though I love Dickens very much, yet Mrs. Henry Wood is like an effervescing draught. Every sentence is delightful and refreshes one, whilst the characters are so real and lifelike that one sorrows and rejoices with them as with friends we have known. Please pardon my writing, and believe me that, though far apart in station, and total strangers, the death of Mrs. Henry Wood is sincerely mourned by thousands among the working classes, and by none of them more than your respectful servant, M. S."

"May I, a stranger, be allowed to offer you my profound and sincere sympathy in a loss so great that only those who have experienced something of the same loss can understand

it. When I read of Mrs. Henry Wood's death, I felt as though I had parted with a friend: All her beautiful writings are familiar to me, some very, very much so. I shall never forget how *East Lynne* impressed me. For long after I used to dream of its author and feast my imagination upon her, wondering and speculating upon many things. Indeed, it was impossible for me to read any of her books without the wish ever coming over me that I might see her and speak with her. I am so sure she must have been all you have written about her, for it is impossible to read her books without feeling that they are written by a most loving and deeply religious woman. I could never go to Malvern or Worcester, but Mrs. Henry Wood came most vividly to my mind. Her presence seemed everywhere: in the Cathedral, in the cloisters, passing up the thoroughfares, by the banks of the Severn—everywhere. So, sir, if it be any comfort to you to know that the outside world has a deep feeling of sympathy with you and yours, then you have it; for though unknown, we are all brethren, and all members of one great household. I trust you may not think it intrusive in a stranger thus writing to you, and will allow the great respect and love for the dead to plead my excuse."

The following impressions are the slight record of a friend who knew Mrs. Henry Wood for many years; one who had laboured long in the ministry in a London parish, had come into contact with all sorts and conditions of men, and had seen human nature in all its phases. They are inserted because they form an impartial and separate testimony to much that has already been affirmed in these pages.

"The task of giving some expression of my ideas and sentiments of the late Mrs. Henry Wood is not very easy, for the simple reason that though her character was as far removed from being commonplace as her writings were from ordinary productions, yet her nature was so retiring and her ways so devoid of self-assertion, that neither in what she said nor in what she did was there anything sufficiently prominent to challenge special attention.

"In the times of early acquaintance the gifted authoress was lost sight of in the presence of the courteous lady and hostess, who with the tact that comes from good breeding and a kindly nature put you at your ease and showed you, though without ostentation, that her desire was to please you.

"A closer intimacy revealed other characteristics. I had known Mrs. Henry Wood through her writings for many years —fifteen or sixteen—before I knew her personally. I was then struck with the identity between herself and her works; what the books were in their aims and principles, such was the writer. The devotion to duty, the high sense of responsibility, the rectitude of purpose, the benevolence and goodness which form true life, and the inseparableness of them all from sincere but unaffected religion, which have so conspicuous a place in all she ever wrote, equally appeared in herself. It was—such at least is my opinion—that because she was what she was in these respects, she produced works which, unless I am greatly mistaken, will live as long as fiction is read. Nor do I think that, great as was the gift of imagination which she possessed, she could ever, her moral qualities being such as I have described, have allowed it to stray beyond the limits which they

imposed upon it. Further acquaintance with her only deepened this conviction.

"Among the points of her character which always much impressed me, her high sense of duty stood out foremost, and stands so still in my remembrance. It imparted a substance and solidity to the writings which her talents made so powerful and attractive; but it also pervaded her whole character and life. Quiet and undemonstrative as she was, one soon perceived that she possessed a singularly clear and independent judgment on which she invariably acted without any reference to what others might say or think; for no one was less in bondage to outside opinion than she was. She formed her opinions, and acted on them, as I believe, from a deep sense of responsibility to God, and a certainty that such opinions came ultimately from Him. It may have been thought that these opinions were sometimes mere prejudices, and it is not for me to say that she was never mistaken in an estimate she had formed of a person or an action; but that estimate was never capricious, but deliberately arrived at from reasons which satisfied her own mind, and the conclusions thus established were never, so far as I recollect, altered in one single instance. She expressed what she thought, clearly and incisively, but seldom if ever argued.

"Her kindness—the term is rather tame, but I can think of none more suitable—was a very conspicuous feature of her character. It was shown in many ways, great and small; in the steadfastness of her friendship, in her helpfulness where help was needed, in her charity to the needy in a lower station, the sick and suffering poor; and in those small but not less

real proofs of it, the kindly welcome, sincere though never effusive, the generous hospitality, the consideration for your comfort, even in trifles, which made her house to me, at least, a home for twenty years.

"Her kindness was equalled by her sympathy. I think, nay, I am sure, that I scarcely ever met with any one to whom I could confide my difficulties or communicate my successes, however small either may have been, with so great a certainty of true appreciation and hearty encouragement. In that respect she was one of the truest friends I ever had.

"Had her kindness and sympathy been less than they were, I think it possible that her sense of duty, her innate truthfulness, and her habit of carefully weighing people and things, would have made her severe in her judgment and expressions; but in point of fact it was the reverse with her, and the impression she has left upon my mind is of one possessing great tolerance of others, and from whom I never heard a harsh or uncharitable opinion. Ill-nature was as foreign to her words as it was to her deeds. She possessed a great reverence, but only for what was worthy of it; emphatically giving every one his due. Honour to whom honour. Yet she would never, I might say could never, have condoned what she deemed wrong in any one, be his or her station what it might; nor did she seek a position in the world to which her talents and her own personal gifts would, had she chosen, have introduced her. Her tastes were simple, and lay in another direction—the retirement and happiness of domestic life.

"Her natural reverence was associated with another very prominent characteristic—her love of order in the high sense

given to it by the poet, that it is 'Heaven's first law.' She could not tolerate disobedience or want of due respect in any one, and assumption or conceit were, I think, next to what was absolutely wrong, the things most distasteful to her. Some might have thought her sometimes to be over-strict in matters of small moment, and perhaps a little too exacting now and then; but in fact her nature was so thorough and so consistent, that I question if she regarded anything as trifling that had to do with duty, whether in a friend, a child, or a domestic. Where it was otherwise, she possessed in large measure that charity which covereth a multitude of sins in others. Her external life was marked by great simplicity, and by no means consisted in the abundance of the things which she possessed. It rested on what was real and not on what was artificial; her enjoyments were intellectual and social. She had no 'hobbies,' as they are called, she neither bought pictures nor collected 'curios,' nor affected sympathy with those who did. She loved music and flowers, but books and friends proved her chief pleasures, and the great sea of human life that ebbed and flowed around was in all its multitudinous aspects, its cares, its joys, and its occupations, a never-failing theme of interest.

"Any description of Mrs. Henry Wood's character would be materially incomplete that did not include some mention of her domestic and, above all, her religious life. Yet here, for obvious reasons, my words must be few. It was impossible not to perceive how very close to her mind was her children's welfare, and how unceasing was her endeavour to promote it by every means in her power, her aim being not only, nor perhaps so much, their temporal good, as that they should in

all respects grow up in accordance with her own high standard of right and duty. Her religious life was uniformly marked by the same reality, thoroughness, and yet simplicity which so strongly distinguished her in all other respects. In it there were both strength and depth, but no noise.

"In all connected with that important subject she took a deep interest. Her own views, coming as they did from reflection and conviction, were not only practical but decided. Indeed, of all the persons I have known, she was, as it struck me, the least likely to be led away by the doctrines of men, however great or learned. Where she had confidence in a person's goodness and aptness to teach, she was a very willing and attentive listener. She took her views straight from the Bible, whose teachings in their fulness she humbly and reverently accepted as the guide for herself and others."

The following reminiscences from Dr. Alexander H. Japp may not unfittingly close this chapter:—

"In the seventies my connection with *Good Words* and the *Sunday Magazine* brought me into relationship with Mrs. Henry Wood. I had occasionally seen Mrs. Wood before this through my friendship with her son, but *then* I saw her more frequently, alike on business and in social intercourse, being often invited to St. John's Wood Park. The first and most lasting impression made on my mind was of a very still, sweet presence, in whose atmosphere no discord could dwell. She looked at once very firm and very amiable—a mixture which in her was tempered by the outflow of ready and unaffected sympathy. Quietude, with an air of great sin-

cerity, and a repose which had in it nothing of self-satisfaction, or indifference to any feeling or emotion in others. She was thus essentially good-mannered—a lady in the truest sense of the word, who had the art—not always a part of so-called good manners—of setting you at once and completely at your ease. I remember, on the first occasion of my dining at her house, a certain tremor in the sense of being for the first time brought into close contact with the great novelist, which was perhaps natural and excusable in me; but it vanished the moment I had exchanged a few words with her, and had answered some unexpected kindly questions about my children, and their characters and ways; about their education, and so on; and, in fact, before I had been beside her half an hour, the great novelist was forgotten, and only the gracious and sympathetic woman was before me.

"Another thing that much impressed me at an early stage of my acquaintance with her was a very uncommon mixture of tact—that seemed natural to her—and ready, quick interest. She was not only keen to hear all about what her sons were interested in and concerned with, but also about their friends and their concerns. In a gentle way she drew every one out, without obtruding herself at all. There was no fussiness, nothing of the busy-body, but a healthy, natural, graceful, easy expression of interest that was prevailing, though in no way boldly asserted. Her whole appearance and expression betokened gentleness, but gentleness with possibilities of great firmness of will behind it where it was needful to exercise it—like Wordsworth's Margaret, 'a woman of a steady mind.' She was slight of stature, but with a very graceful carriage of the

head, and the kind of figure that looks taller than it really is from moving lightly, and with an airy ease: intellectual without affectation, and refined while still in the best sense domesticated and approachable.

"She was not much inclined to discuss her own novels; but I remember well on one occasion when I was at her house, and Miss Hesba Stretton and Miss Anne Beale were there, her readiness to speak of the points in their works which had been interesting to her, and which she had derived pleasure from. She was, with regard to the works of others, at once keen and generous in judgment.

"One of the things about which I had to talk with her was the touching story of 'Bessy Wells,' a story of low life in London, which appeared in the pages of the *Sunday Magazine*. I had already seen a good bit in the way of visiting low quarters of London, alike in the purlieus of Drury Lane, Old Kent Road, Deptford, Ratcliffe Highway, and other parts, and her interest in the little details which I could communicate to her was very great indeed. It is astonishing how keen her curiosities were in these matters, and how absolutely, by force of imagination and sympathy, she had realised the whole condition and scope of that life; so that few suggestions needed to be given her in regard to 'Bessy Wells,' compared with what it has been my lot to have to tender to writers of fiction alike as regards the circumstances of the poor, prisons, reformatories, etc. Her realising power is scarcely anywhere more marked than in this little story, which in this respect has a value of its own, though it does not of course aim at the kind of interest which obtains in

her novels proper. But it shows her especially as the interested inquirer into social conditions, and into the means by which the sufferings of the poor and fallen might be lessened or removed.

"Though with none of the affectations of the Society woman, she was a very racy talker, and apt at finding the available meeting-point in another, due in degree to her quick sympathy, in degree to her insight and natural tact. And it may be added that, although she was averse to discussing her own books, she would very readily discuss the knotty points in a plot, or listen to a difficulty that had arisen in a complicated law-case, or the solution that had been brought to some exciting mystery in real life. Her quiet and unobtrusive largeness of interest was one of the most noticeable things about her. It was seen in her ways with her children; in her happy art in finding unmistakably the interests of others and in answering to them; and to this perhaps was due in great degree her splendid memory, from which anything that had touched or deeply impressed her was really never effaced. The secret too, perhaps, of her success in pictures of boy-character.

"Whatever subject came on the *tapis*, she was apt to throw new light upon it. How gently came her suggestive words, how sufficing the reasons with which on occasion she could back up the position she took! And she had a great art in stating a case. Even if this was no more than the impression that certain words or acts must have on the mind of another person, she had the gift of making it clear, and by this gift was able to serve others very materially.

"I can clearly see her once more as I write, her fine, expressive countenance lit up as she bends forward a little in her chair, gently to suggest some new view or point that had been left out of count, as with her right hand she throws back her cap-string, and then quietly extends her hand towards you; and the smile that accompanies the action is the finest commentary on the words and on her kindly intents. I could add more were I near papers and letters which are unfortunately at a distance; but these few paragraphs will perhaps suffice to attest the abiding impression made on me of gentleness, resolution, grace, elevation of character, large sympathy and disinterestedness which I carried away with me from those visits I paid to Mrs. Wood at St. John's Wood Park, the recollection of which I cherish."

HIGHGATE.

CHAPTER XXVII

"That God, which ever lives and loves,
One God, one law, one element,
And one far-off divine event,
To which the whole creation moves."

SOUTH AISLE, WORCESTER.

THESE letters and records out of an immense number received, all strike the same keynote, showing that Mrs. Henry Wood's influence extended almost as a mesmeric atmosphere to friends and strangers alike, all instinctively recognising the beauty and charm of her nature.

Her life was lived in the calmest and most gentle manner. It has been said that religion was seldom

mentioned by her, as too sacred to be made the topic of conversation. On rare occasions, when it became her duty to speak, her words were few, but impressive with the rare power of conviction. In the earlier years of training, she never wearied even her children with lengthened sittings and difficult tasks, but she never omitted to have them with her for a few minutes morning after morning, year after year; and if the earnest tones failed in their mission, no earthly power could avail.

It is right to insist upon this, the highest and best of her many gifts; especially in these days when thoughts and opinions are changing; and because it has too often been the case that the higher spiritual graces have not accompanied great powers of the imagination.

It was also the unobtrusiveness of that spiritual life which gave it such prevailing influence, conquering by the force of example alone. She was followed, but she never commanded or dictated. Yet we possess letters from great men declaring that her influence upon them will be undying; and this is no mere form of words.

An intimate friend and learned divine was wont to say: "Whatever of greatness, or beauty, or charm there is in Mrs. Henry Wood's heroines, she herself infinitely surpasses them all." And again he would add: "She had persuaded him into the belief that, as there had been religious inspiration in the past, so there was secular inspiration in the present." This was the opinion of one who had seen more of the world and human nature than most of his kind.

In the sense of a void neither time nor change can

ever fill again, all praise falls cold, lifeless and unworthy. It may seem to some that her charms and virtues have been exaggerated. It is indeed difficult, even after many years of silence and separation, to write calmly and dispassionately, but this only proves how great was her power, how abiding her influence. There still exists a "cloud of witnesses" who would testify to this truth.

She had once delighted in Martin's *Plains of Heaven*, it was so like the realms that had ever haunted her dreams; and to those Plains where flows the pure River of the Water of Life, her spirit must have taken its flight, in Ways of Pleasantness and in Paths of Peace. And there she must be sought by those to whom in this life she was beyond price, and for whom her true and loyal heart beat with the pulses of the most fervent though silent thought, affection, and devotion.

It is singular that the title of the very last *Johnny Ludlow* story was *Silent for Ever;* and this thought concluded the paper. As she did so, she looked up to one who happened to be in the room, and said with a wistful expression never to be forgotten: "My work is almost done. It is certain that I shall never write much more." Again the words were sadly prophetic, for though her last illness had not then commenced, she had for ever laid down her pen.

Silent for ever in this world it may be, but throughout eternity rejoicing evermore. She had once remarked that if we were permitted to continue our occupations in the next world, nothing would give her greater pleasure than to go on writing books for ever. How that may be cannot be told,

since we have no revelation; and so best, without doubt. Sufficient the promise that "in that Fair Land where our hearts abide" failures and unfulfilled desires will be lost in the realisation of all true hopes and aspirations.

Such, then, was Mrs. Henry Wood, so great the loss to those she left behind. The last chapter of Proverbs is true to her in all points: "Her price is far above rubies. . . . The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her. . . . She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms. . . . Strength and honour are her clothing, and she shall rejoice in time to come. . . . She openeth her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue is the law of kindness. . . . Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates. . . .

"Her children arise up, and call her blessed."

WORCESTER AT EVENTIME.

J. D. & Cc.

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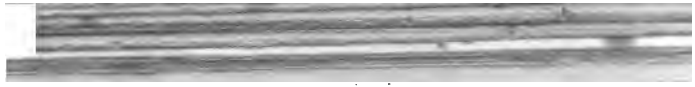

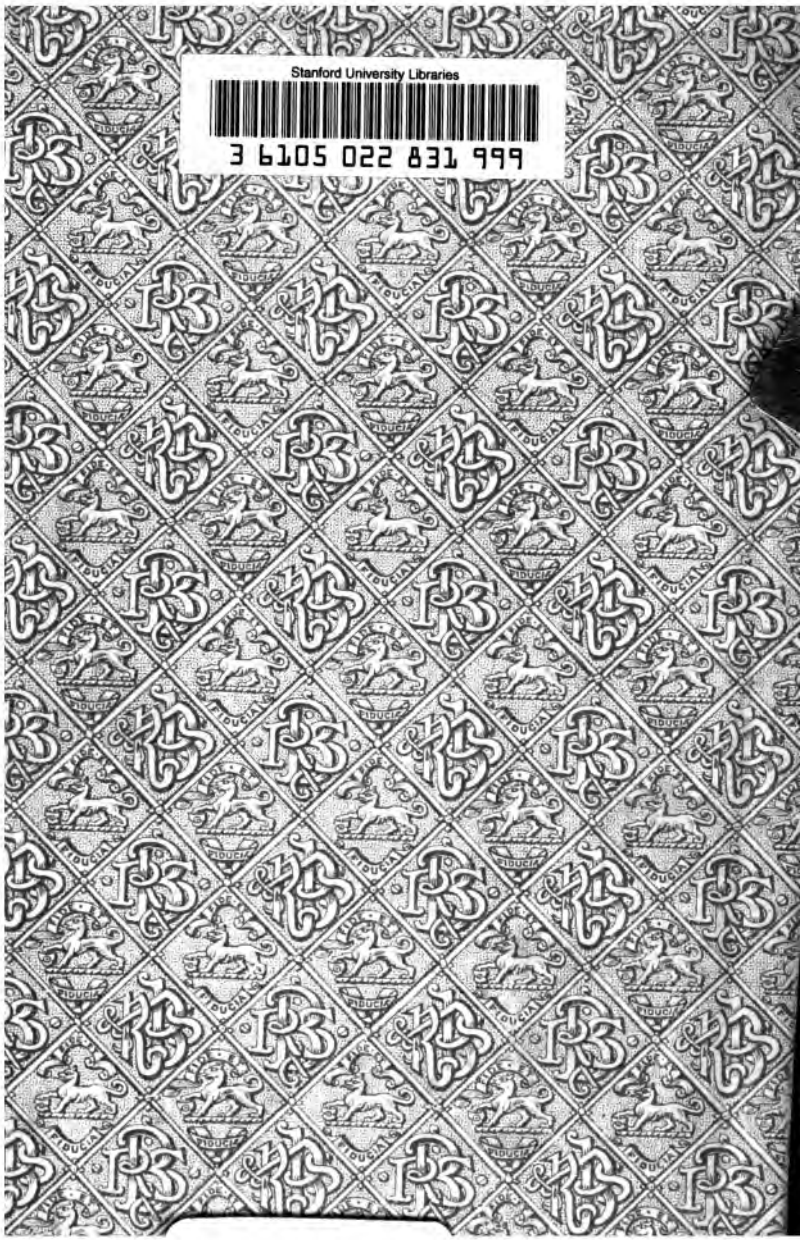
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